SILVER CAVES.

THE IMPASSABLE CHASM (Page 91).

Silver Caves, Frontispiece.

THE SILVER CAVES

A MINING STORY

BY

ERNEST INGERSOLL

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

CONTENTS.

THE "LAST CHANCE."

THE SILVER CAVES.

CHAPTER I.

THE "LAST CHANCE."

MATTERS had come to a crisis with Len and Max, when Sandy McKinnon arrived at the camp, with a letter of introduction from a friend in Denver.

These two young men had not been at all fortunate, so far, and, like the rest of the community, were sorely discouraged. They had wavered for some days between deserting the place and another alternative, the nature of which they kept to themselves, for they knew that they might not only be laughed at, but perhaps prevented from carrying out their plan, were it announced.

The camp I refer to is now a flourishing

town, the center of many small side-villages on the northern slope of Sierra San Juan; but twenty-five years ago, when my story occurred, it was at the point of collapse, and perhaps would never have recovered had not what I am about to relate occurred; and you must bear with me while I explain the circumstances that led up to its revival.

The beginnings of the town had been made half a dozen miles higher up Panther Creek, almost at its source, in fact; but after digging numberless prospect-holes and driving three fairly long tunnels, everybody voted that locality a failure, and came down to the present town-site where paying mines had since been worked for two or three years.

The two young men had become the owners, some time before, of one of these early tunnels (that one nearest the source of the Creek), through taking it as payment of a joint debt because nothing better was to be had. It was called the *Last Chance*, and the boys accepted the name as significant, and

proposed to risk what means they had left in giving the mine a new trial.

About 200 feet down stream was a second tunnel, the *Aurora*, owned by two men who were friendly to our heroes, one of whom, named Bowen, was famous for his reckless yet good-natured exploits of bravado.

Some distance still farther down the cañon, on the same side (the right-hand wall of the narrow gulch, looking down stream), was the third old tunnel, the *Cardinal.* This last was the property of a thorough scallawag, despised and avoided by all respectable citizens, and only kept from being a positive criminal by his natural cowardice. The enmity of this man, whose real name was lost in the nick-names "Old Bob" and "Squint-eye," had been incurred by the boys through their exposing a fraud by which he had once proposed to sell to a stranger named Anderson, as a productive mine, this very property — the Last Chance — although he neither owned it nor believed it worth anything.

It was not strange, therefore, that, while trying to avoid general curiosity, they were especially anxious to keep their intentions secret from Old Bob.

And just at this juncture came Mr. Alexander McKinnon, straight from Glasgow, and hoping to do something at the camp which might teach him how silver mining should be carried on, and perhaps open a way to make his fortune. Placing all the chances of failure, and their poverty, fairly before him, they offered to let him into their new partnership, to be called Brehm, Bushwick & Co., on very liberal terms, and he accepted.

So they fitted him out with the kind of clothing, tools, and general outfit which were needful, purchased enough provisions to last a fortnight, after which they could come to town for more, and to-morrow the three were to start bright and early to their new home and the Last Chance.

When the rising sun of the next morning had begun to tinge the snow-peaks with

rose-color, but hours before his beams could scale the mountain wall of this deep valley and flood it with warmth and light, our hopeful adventurers were awake and busy with breakfast.

Sandy showed himself a much more skillful cook than either of his American friends, and was warmly applauded.

"There's a difference between fend and fare weell," he remarked, sententiously, when they told him of some of their troubles in this matter; "by which I mean," he added, as he saw their puzzled faces, "that shifting for a meal is bad policy beside knowing how to have plenty of good food and how to prepare it. It's poor economy, I'm thinkin', to half-starve one's self. 'Lang fasting hains'—that's *saves*, ye ken—'nae bread.'"

McKinnon dropped more and more into broad Scotch as he became better acquainted, and his fund of old saws, into each of which whole chapters of worldly experience had

been boiled down, were a constant source of enjoyment to his partners.

Breakfast out of the way in a hurry, the three *burros* (Mexican donkeys) hired to carry their luggage were brought around, the little sawbuck saddles placed upon their backs, and cinched to them with a tightness that made them groan and grunt lustily; then the load of each was placed between the forks, or hung to the four horns of the saddle, surmounted by the long-handled tools, and securely lashed on by ropes and thongs of twisted rawhide, which never break or stretch, and rarely get loose from the "squaw-hitch."

The whole baggage made about six fair burro-loads, and these were to be carried in two trips. It was not necessary for them to burden themselves with a great amount of furniture or provisions, since the former could be left locked up in town, and the provisions could be replenished when they ran short. Besides, the lads expected to catch an

abundance of trout and perhaps shoot an occasional deer or mountain sheep, an expectation in which they would not have been disappointed had the extraordinary affair which happened later left time for hunting and fishing.

The trail was a steep and little-used pathway up the mountain, through dense woods, where it straggled about to avoid rocks and fallen logs. It was built up, shelf-fashion, around projecting knobs, crossed fierce torrents upon narrow bridges, and was full of sharp turns, miry holes, and bad going of every description. Here and there an opening in the forest gave a magnificent view, far out over the foot-hills, for the elevation, toward the head of the creek, was more than four thousand feet above the valleys and fully ten thousand feet above the sea.

Beyond the woods the party found itself on the brink of a deep gorge, at the bottom of which Panther Creek tore down in a series of cascades. The torrent ran four or

five hundred feet below, and above them the mountains rose to invisible heights. Along this cliff-face the narrow trail had been carried irregularly and often very dangerously, but the hardy little beasts picked their way cautiously up and down, and never sank too deep in a bog or got too far over the edge of a precipice.

Finally the trail reached the edge of the creek, near its head, and here was a ford, beyond which it led through the willows and over the Aurora's dump to the Last Chance, whose cabin, perched on a bench, or terrace, was gained by a stiff climb up a zigzag in the face of the rocky bluff.

The burros were turned loose in a small meadow above the cabin, and after a hearty supper the tired boys quickly made beds of boughs and blankets, and slept as their long tramp entitled them to do.

FURNISHING A NEW HOME.

CHAPTER II.

THE FURNISHING OF A NEW HOME.

It was understood, without discussion, that Max should take the superintendence of all mining operations, that Len should be the buyer and business man of the firm generally, and that Sandy should look after the housekeeping. Of course, they would all work together, but these were the specialties of each partner.

"Now who is to go back after the rest of our possessions," demanded Lennox, as they gathered at breakfast on the morning following their arrival. "I don't reckon there's any use of two going."

"No—I'd as lief do it," Max remarked. "I can re-cinch and manage the jacks rather better than the rest of you, I imagine."

"You certainly have my permission," remarked Lennox, with a smile.

"An' I'm no hinderin' ye, as the brig said to the burn," Sandy echoed. "The young man frae Virginia can stay an' help me get the hoose in trim."

So the donkeys were brought up and saddled, Max marched away, and the other lads turned to their house-cleaning.

The former owners of the property had built a pretty good log cabin at the head of the dump, close to the mouth of the tunnel, the door and front window of which faced down the gulch and straight at the Aurora's dump. There was a rude fireplace in which had been left a dilapidated cooking stove. The first task was the straightening up of this, and putting it into condition for use, which Len soon accomplished.

At the farther end of the cabin a series of bunks had been built out of poles. These were now broken and unwholesome, so they were pulled to pieces, the loose bark and other dirt cleared away from the logs and floor behind them, and new ones were put up,

a layer of slender, elastic poles making an excellent bed-bottom in each bunk; and spruce boughs luxurious mattresses upon which to spread the buffalo robes and blankets.

This and some other tidying had taken all day, but when Max came in about sundown, the kettle was singing and dancing on the old stove, that leaked fire-light, if not fire, from a dozen cracks, and all three were well satisfied with themselves and their snug home ; while the boy, who came with Max to drive the donkeys back, was loud in his praises, and went away convinced that no body on the Creek could make flapjacks equal to Sandy McKinnon.

That evening, as they sat in the doorway, wedging handles into the picks and preparing the little mine lamps, Max suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh, I forgot to tell you ! While I was packing the last burro, Squint-eyed Bob came moseying around and wanted to know what I was up to and where I was going, and so on—evidently prying 'round for informa-

tion. I gave him short answers, but he wasn't satisfied, and finally boned me outright to know if we weren't going up to Jim Bowen's mine on Panther Creek. That roused my dander. 'Hang it, Bob,' I retorted, 'what business is it of yours, where I'm going, or what I am doing? May be I'm going up Panther Creek and may be I'm not —I don't see what odds it makes to you!' He saw I was mad and backed off, but he blurted out one thing before he left, that I don't quite savvy."

"What was that?"

"I can't give his words exactly, but it was to the effect that 'in this country, when a man jumped another man's claim he was dog-on likely to hear from it pretty soon, and that what was left of him wasn't worth any funeral expenses.' Then he yelled something about 'fixing me,' and went off. Now what can he do?"

"Oh, nothing at all," said Len. "Its all bluster. He was trying to bluff you."

"That may be, but he means to make mischief if he can, and we must look out for him. However, I fancy we're safe till morning, and I'm going to sleep. Good-night."

"As for Jim Bowen," Len answered, "he told me himself, when he was here last, that if I ever wanted to do anything in or about the Aurora, I was welcome to do what I could, for he never should try to develop it"

A DISCOURAGING EXPLORATION.

CHAPTER III.

A DISCOURAGING EXPLORATION.

It was with eager interest that the young partners shouldered their picks, lighted their lamps, and prepared to begin work on the second day after their arrival. And yet it was with no little trepidation—at any rate in the minds of the two leaders in the enterprise; for Max and Len well knew that they were relying wholly upon a theory, and were going against not only the experience of the early prospectors and miners here, but against the judgment of the whole population of the district, among which were many miners of practical knowledge. As for Sandy—a stranger to these facts—he was simply full of the buoyancy which hope and novelty lends to every new movement in the line of one's ambition.

If there is anything more inspiriting than mining for the precious metals, the world has not yet found it. It is the secret charm of how many a fairy tale! By it how many a fable can be practically interpreted! Just before you, perhaps right under the first clod, or hidden in the dark recesses of this very crevice out of which springs the service-bush whose sugary berries you are pausing to taste, lies waiting the all-powerful gold.

But just here halt with me a moment, while I sketch the position and outward appearance of this mine. The entrance of the tunnel had been made in a pretty nearly vertical face of rock, at the edge of the little bench or terrace upon which the cabin stood, and the rock which had been excavated had been brought out by cars running upon a rude wooden tramway, and pitched down into the valley, forming an elongated heap of stone, like the beginning of a railway embankment. This was called "the dump." The track still remained along the level top of the dump, and

one of the small cars, somewhat out of repair, lay overturned beside it, its load, apparently the last brought out of the mine, still half filling its box.

How deep and large the tunnel or drift might be, the boys could judge only by the size of the dump, for a heavy door prevented entrance. From under the door trickled a stream of clear cold water, which had already proved a great convenience. The Aurora mine, a hundred yards below, was almost precisely similar in outward appearance—even to the rivulet, but it had no door.

Breakfast dispatched and overalls donned, their picks sharpened, their lamps "trimmed and burning," the firm marched up to the portal in single file, Max at the head.

"Open, sesame!" shouted the leader.

"Allee samee open," echoed Len, in the best Chinese he knew.

"Kai duxon parasitidos gignotai," muttered McKinnon in broad Gaelic Greek.

But his talisman was no more effective

than that of the others, and the door stood firm.

Max struck an attitude resembling Thor with his hammer, and made ready to deal the barricade a splintering blow.

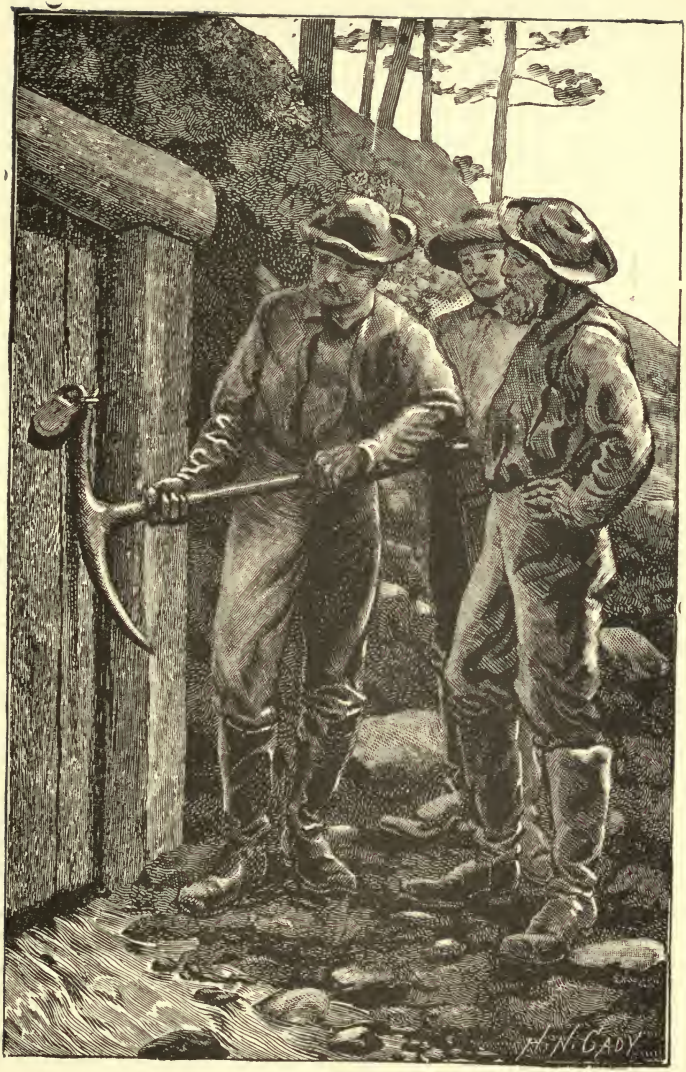
"He that would eat the kernel maun crack the nut," pronounced Sandy, in as solemn a tone of voice as though he were giving a death-warrant.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Len, seizing his partner's uplifted arm. "Don't smash it. I reckon we can get in more peaceably. Let's try to pry off the lock."

"Very well," assented Max; "here goes!"

Inserting his pick-point carefully into the staple clasping the padlock, by which the door seemed to be secured, two or three forcible wrenches pulled it out, and the released latch fell easily out of place.

It only remained to swing open the door and face the burst of icily damp air that rushed out, as though delighted to be set free and allowed to mingle with the sunshine.



FORCING THE BARRICADE.

Silver Caves, Page 24.

You will remember that a steady stream of water was described as pouring out from beneath this door, and coursing down the side of the dump in a channel which showed it had long been followed. The water was cold and pure, and had proved a great convenience to the boys in the cabin, who otherwise must have made a tedious descent to the creek-bed for all they wanted to use.

Upon opening the door it was seen that this stream spread itself over nearly the whole width of the tunnel, which was badly made and far from orderly.

The trio were not afraid of mud and water, however, so they pushed their way in, stumbling along over fallen fragments, and in and out of the puddles, feeling that it would take a longer time to clear the path of these obstacles than they could well afford. They had not gone more than thirty or forty paces, however, when the tunnel became choked with prostrate and moldy timbers and great heaps of fallen rock, which they could with

difficulty crawl over. No sooner had this first obstruction been passed than a second similar one was encountered, and they began to feel that it was perilous work to proceed under a tunnel roof so insecure as this one appeared to be.

"I wonder how much deeper this thing is," said Max, after a third great barricade had been surmounted. "What did our dear old friend, the late lamented proprietor, tell you under that head, Lennox?"

"Said it was 180 feet long."

"But he didn't mention that it was only six inches wide!" Max retorted, coming to a halt at the same time.

"We may as well go on a bit farther," Sandy advised. "A Scotchman doesna like to gie it up till he ha' seen the end of a thing. 'A'maist and very near,' I've heard, 'hae aye been great liars.'"

"All right, we'll explore it as long as we can scramble," Max rejoined cheerfully, and the three pushed on, enduring many a bump

and scratch on hands and toes, knees and elbows, in spite of their lamp light.

Before long, however, progress was completely blocked. A great mass of the roof had fallen where a crevice opened upward and sideways, and out of this crevice gushed a steady stream of water to swell that which trickled from lesser fountains elsewhere, and drained out along the bottom of the tunnel.

"Thus far and no farther. Satisfied, Sandy?"

"Oo, aye. 'Down wi' the lid,' quo' Willie Reid."

They were turning back when Max asked them to wait a minute, and taking out a pocket-compass, he noted as well as he was able the direction the excavation pointed at that inner end.

"I suspect," he explained, "that as it deepens this tunnel bends a trifle to the left—down the creek—on a slight curve following the vein. If so I want to know it."

Making their way out, he took another

compass observation near the entrance and found he was right, though the bend was a slight one.

Before leaving the inner end, the two Americans had selected several specimens of the vein-rock from the sides and roof of the tunnel, and other pieces were gathered as they returned. When daylight was reached they spread these specimens out and talked them over, explaining to Sandy, who turned out rather wiser in respect to minerals than he had claimed to be, what were the prominent characteristics of each kind of rock represented.

A few of the fragments, showing some peculiar brown nodules and threads, they separated from the rest, and compared them with similar pieces taken from the overturned car-load on the dump, which had excited their attention before. None of the rock at the entrance had shown this characteristic; all pieces of that kind, they discovered, had come from the innermost depth.

"If we could get past that barrier I think we should find much more of it," Max remarked.

"We know well enough as to that," Len replied, "for certainly that car-load was about the last one brought from the mine, and must show what the breast is made of."

"What do you mean by the breast?" Sandy inquired.

"The rock across the end of the tunnel into which the digging is carried forward."

"Well," Max resumed, "the gangue there, judging by the car-load of specimens, contains more of this brown stuff than anything we saw as far as we went, so I think it is fair to conclude that it increases steadily in that direction, and that if the tunnel were pushed farther the whole vein would be seen, before very long, to be well impregnated with it, taking the place of this useless copper and quartz."

"Can we not examine the outcrop?" Sandy asked, "and learn something from that?"

The outcrop of a vein is that part of it which appears above the surface of the soil, or enclosing rocks,—crops out, as geologists say.

"I don't know; perhaps so. It would do no harm to go and take a look at it."

MAX HAS AN IDEA.

CHAPTER IV.

MAX HAS AN IDEA.

Nobody, of course, would ever deliberately have purchased a piece of mining property about which he knew so little as these lads did about the Last Chance claim. But it must be remembered, that they did not buy after selection, but that the mine was forced quickly upon them, taken, like Hobson's choice of a horse in the stable which held but one animal, because there was no other pay to be got. Now it was their business to explore the property thoroughly and see what could be made out of it. They knew that many a mine had been abandoned by one owner and yielded a fortune to his successor; it was possible some good might have been overlooked in this one. "No man," wrote the wise philosopher, Francis Bacon, "prospers so suddenly as by other's errors."

At any rate, they proposed to find out all they could about the prospect-hole, and not run away without at least loudly knocking at fortune's door. A man can endure failure with much composure when he feels that it has been through no lack of diligence on his part, and if success follows, it is all the more satisfactory for having been earned by good judgment and hard work.

Putting into their pockets some pieces of cold bread and a handful apiece of dried fruit, for they did not know how far their search might lead them, they began to climb the steep rocks which formed the wall of the valley, and after a few moments worked their way up to where a less steeply inclined slope stretched onward to the summit of the range. Here, after some difficulty, they were able to discover the crest or outcrop of their vein, and to trace it two or three hundred yards by its occasional appearance at ledges and bare spots among the herbage and heather of short, thick, huckleberry-like bushes, which clothed

the mountain-side. At the farther border of this plateau, a huge land-slide, in some long-past spring, had come thundering down from the cliffs above, burying under it all further trace of the vein, no outcropping of which was visible in the rocks again exposed a quarter of a mile beyond, so far as they could make out after a wearisome tramp of investigation.

It was evident that they had not been the first to go over this ground, for nigh under the foot of the land-slide, which was now a bank of richest flowers, some nodding on tall stems in the splendor of purple, scarlet and gold, others equally gaudy but more lowly, bearing blossoms modestly beautiful in white and brown, they found a pit ten or twelve feet deep, sunken into the rock.

The stone which had been thrown out of this pit was examined with great care, and Max even scrambled down to its bottom and flaked off more specimens, which he tossed up with exclamations of rejoicing. They cer-

tainly showed a far larger proportion of the brown mineral, in which our prospectors were taking so much interest, than anything that had yet been seen, and strengthened the notion that it increased in plenty the farther the vein was followed.

"Now let us see if we were right about the bending," Max remarked, when he had climbed out of the prospect-hole.

"All right," Len answered, his tongue hampered by bunches of the acrid purple berries of the Oregon grape, which not only filled his mouth, but puckered his lips. "Can you trace the outcrop all the way?"

"No, but I'm going to climb up on this slide a little ways, and then have you go back and stand at the edge of the cliff, while Sandy stands midway between us. I can see then whether the vein curves."

"Why, of course it does," called out the Scotchman, who had quietly mounted the broken face of the land-slide, until he could overlook the ground. "The vein just fol-

lows along the base o' this low ridge here, and I can see that it curves quite decidedly."

"What ridge?"

"You can scarcely glint it, I dare say, where you stan', but come up here, and you will see it plainly. It's lang and narrow."

The others mounted to his side, and then could easily discern that a narrow ridge, like the ruins of a big wall which had been made of white rock but now was fallen and overgrown with weeds and briers, stretched in a gentle curve from the brink of the gulch to the foot of the land-slide, where it seemed a trifle narrower than at the cliff.

"And look there," said Max, pointing with his finger straight across the gulch to the gray wall of the opposite mountain, which seemed to rise almost plumb from the bed of Panther Creek. "Look! Do you see that whitish upright patch, with the darker streaks on each side of it, extending up and down the face of the cliff?"

"Ay," they assented together, Lennox adding, "It's like a Kensington panel."

"Plainly that panel is the continuation of this ridge and the vein, which have been cut through by the creek.

"But there's another vein on the other side apparently."

"Yes, that must be the extension of the Aurora lead. And if I am not mistaken this ridge is a wedge of porphyry, what geologists call a dyke, thrust up between these two veins. Probably it narrows in or pinches, as they say, just here, and further on would thicken again."

"Do you mean that it split what was originally one vein," Len asked, "and pried the halves apart?"

"No, I should say not, for, as you know, the rock in the Last Chance is different from that in the Aurora. Probably the dyke was formed first, and the lodes came afterward by forcing themselves between it and the trachyte-body of the mountain."

"That's a' vera interesting," was Sandy's dry remark, "but, in my eegnorance, permeet me to ask how it affects our eenterests practically? A blind man's nae judge o' colors, ye ken."

"I am not sure that it affects our interests at all, and yet I have an idea it may."

"Trot out your little idea!" exclaimed Len, with characteristic impatience; and with equally characteristic caution Max declined to do so until he had thought more about it. Whereupon, with good-natured compliance, his questioners departed and busied themselves in hunting for more of the tart berries of the Oregon grape, which grew purple among the lichen-printed stones.

Returning half an hour later they found Max pacing slowly down the crest of the ridge like a sentinel on a rampart.

"I want you fellows to help me get the breadth or thickness of this dyke here as nearly as we can come at it."

"How?" asked Len.

"Oh, by pacing over the ridge and estimating it carefully."

They decided after a close examination that it was about one hundred feet in thickness at that point, or, at any rate, considerably less than the distance between the Last Chance and Aurora lodes, at the mouths of their respective tunnels.

Then they strolled back to their cabin, where Sandy busied himself in mixing raised bread for the evening meal, while Max stuck a lamp in his cap and disappeared within the Aurora tunnel.

When, that evening, the trio were ready to sit down together again around a cheerful fire outside the house, Max threw off his reserve and began to talk.

"I suppose you fellows think I've been a running things in a high-handed sort of a way this afternoon, but I had to do a bit of studying over my idea before I could get it into such a shape that I could explain it to you, and get your help intelligently. See?"

SITUATION OF THE TWO MINES.

Silver Caves, Page 41.

"Ay," Sandy answered for both. "Ilka bird must hatch its ain egg."

"Well, this is the egg I have been incubating. I am convinced that there is nothing to be got out of the Aurora; it's just a dead quartz-lode all through. But our mine will show more and more of the stuff we want the deeper we go, or else I am greatly mistaken."

"But it will take all the fall to clean that tunnel out and timber it up so as to be safe!" Len grumbled.

"Exactly! Now the Aurora is open and has a firm roof. She runs right alongside of ours, with only that dyke between them like a stone partition, and goes about one hundred feet further into the hillside. My notion is to go to the end of the Aurora, cut through the dyke into the Last Chance lode, and so get quickly at new rock, beyond any reached by our old drift, where I believe the mineral will be found richer, since all that we can learn goes to show that the lode improves steadily

in the quantity of that brown stuff which it carries. What do you think of it?"

"It sounds very reasonable indeed," Len agreed instantly, and went on to elaborate the plan with his customary enthusiasm, but the more cautious nature of McKinnon asserted itself in questions.

"D' ye ken whether the dyke-rock is haird or saft?" he inquired, among other things.

"Not certainly," Max answered. "It's easy enough to work at the surface, but it may be much tougher down below. It appears to be coarse porphyry all through, however, and that usually does not make very hard digging."

"Should we have to blast?"

"I suppose so, now and then,"

"Do you know how?"

"Oh yes, that is not a difficult matter when one has cartridges of giant powder."

"How long do you suppose it will take to dig through the partition?"

"Can't say. If we work hard and have

good luck, I should think we ought to cross-cut the dyke in from two to three weeks."

These objections, and all the obstacles likely to be encountered, as well as the probable success of the venture, having been thoroughly discussed and a favorable decision reached, no time was lost, next day, in beginning upon their plan of opening at the farthest end a cross-cut through the porphyry dyke separating the Aurora from their own vein.

The whole of the first day's toil, however, was expended in setting the broken car (of which I have already spoken) in good shape upon its wheels; in dragging it over to the other mine, a work of no little difficulty, and in clearing the floor of the tunnel of fallen fragments, so that the car could be pushed along the rails without impediment.

On the second day, however, digging could be done in earnest. As only two could work to advantage at once, and as they did not

care to labor for ten or twelve hours at a stretch, they arranged a series of watches by which each one had about two hours in the tunnel and then two hours outside, when he could be attending to the house, preparing meals, or, as presently became necessary, stand guard over the defenses.

The rock of the dyke proved to be a pinkish quartzose porphyry, containing crystals of felspar, garnets,—many of which were very perfect, and these were carefully saved by the miners,—hornblende and several other minerals. Though in many places so tough that they were obliged to drill holes and blast it, much of the time the rock could be knocked down with the pick, and at one point proved to be so soft and spongy that it fairly crumbled under their blows, and they made as much progress in one morning as had before cost two whole days of labor.

As fast as the rock was tumbled down from the breast it was shoveled into a wheelbarrow and taken to the mouth of the cross-

cut, where it was reloaded into the little car which ran on rails in the old Aurora. As soon as this had been filled, it was pushed out to the mouth of the tunnel and its cargo thrown down the side of the mountain, over the front of the great dump of waste rock already built out from the mouth of the cave.

Thus two weeks of hard and systematic work with shovel, pick and barrow, carried them through the dyke, and on the morning of the fifteenth day their tools struck into the darker and wholly different vein-rock of their own lode, a hundred feet or so beyond the breast, or interior end, of the Last Chance tunnel.

OLD BOB TAKES A PARTNER.

CHAPTER V.

OLD BOB TAKES A PARTNER.

One day when our miners were nearing the end of their cross-cut, Old Bob was sitting in his cabin down in the outskirts of the village, trying with his squinting eyes and stiff fingers to mend a pair of brown duck trousers, which were past any further wearing without repairs.

He was worrying and muttering over this miserable task, when he heard hurried footsteps approach and stop at the door. A moment later it was pushed open and a man entered whom he did not recognize.

"I 'spose likely you don't know me," the stranger said. "I'm Scotty."

"Scotty, eh? Well, stranger, I don't know ye much better by that, but take a

cheer. Did ye come over the range? and did ye have any business with me?"

The stranger sat down, took from his pocket a flat-bottle, unscrewed the top and offered it to his host.

Bob received it, remarked civilly, "Well, here's how," and poured a deep draught of its contents down his throat. Then wiping his lips with the back of his hand he passed the bottle back, with the comment:

"You air a gentleman, sir, or you wouldn't be passin' round whisky 's good as that."

"Well, I try to treat a square man right when I meet him. Do you remember a little scrimmage in the El Dorado a few days ago with a feller in your camp here, named Morris? I guess you wa'n't there."

"No," Bob replied, "I had other business that night. But I heerd about it, and came darned near being hung afterward by a little mistake o' the boys, who thought I was hiding the feller they bounced out of town so suddent."

"Didn't you hear his name?"

"No—nobody knowed him, and I never set eyes on the coon."

"I'm the man."

"You?" yelled Bob—surprised fairly out of his wits.

"Yes, that's me, and I reckon its all right."

"Well, Scotty," Bob replied. "I've drunk with you, and when I drink with a man he's my friend; but ef I hadn't you'd have to get right out o' this, 'cause I aint got use for fellers like you."

"Now, Mr.—?" The visitor hesitated, in a questioning way, evidently wishing the name to be supplied.

"No matter about the mister, call me Bob as the rest of the boys do. I hain't mistered *you* yet."

"Now, Bob," Scotty began again, "you may be prejudiced. That aint fair as between friends. You ought to hear both sides. I'm not so bad a man as they make

out in this 'ere camp. Fact is, we were all pretty high-strung that night, and a little rumpus oughtn't to be laid up agin a gentleman who tries to deal square and make an honest livin'. I don't lay up nothin' agin Morris. We just pulled pistols on one another as gentlemen will sometimes, ye know, and he got the drop. That's all. Now a man like me shouldn't be sent out o' town for a little thing like that. It's an outrage, and you know it, Bob."

"Yes," the upright Robert assented. "It's a big outrage. Mor'n that, I b'lieve the boys would see it now, 'n' nobody'd say a word if you were to go into the El Dorado to-night. I'll risk it, 'n' I'll introduce you as my friend, and then let any one object if he thinks best!"

"There's one young feller you can't catch with no chaff like that, and if I get a good chance, I'll break his head."

"Who's that?"

"Don't know his name, a tall, red-bearded

galoot, that looks like a Scotchman. Now I'm part Scotch myself and I admire the way he hit me under the ear, for my country's sake, but all the same I owe him one!"

"Why, that must be that new pardner of Brehm and Bushwick's up the creek."

"Very likely. He'd just come up in the stage and was askin' after a man o' that name."

Describing him to one another, they agreed that Sandy was the object of Scotty's special aversion. This knock-down incident (into which it is unnecessary to go more particularly) was only one more count against the firm, and a new bond uniting this precious pair of scallawags. How and why Bob hated Max and Lennox we know; for a still better reason the gambler fostered a grudge against Sandy. They needed no oath-taking, therefore, to make them firm allies in any plan which might present itself to get revenge and possible profit; but in

respect to the latter point they had deceived themselves into a belief that our young friends had far more money than was really the case.

PROGRESS IN MINING.

CHAPTER VI.

PROGRESS IN MINING.

Almost as soon as Max had dug through the dyke, and penetrated the Last Chance lode, he saw, to his great satisfaction, that he had reasoned correctly, for the vein showed even here a much larger proportion than before of the brown streaks and nodules, which, in their opinion, constituted its value. Whether the rest of the gangue carried gold or silver, could not be known, but that this rusty material contained one or the other they felt confident. The assurance that it increased the deeper the vein was followed, therefore gave them great encouragement and raised their enthusiasm to the highest pitch.

The moment this vein was struck, however, a new difficulty met them, for they found that in this part it was full of crevices,

through which water percolated from above. At first this water was disregarded and trickled out through the cross-cut, but as they advanced in their digging it grew more and more troublesome, and harmful to their health. Max therefore proposed to cut a drain down through the vein of the Last Chance to the old tunnel entrance, and soon convinced the others that it was necessary to do so.

This was certainly a misfortune, and an unlooked for one. It consumed valuable time, cost money which they could ill spare, and was in itself an intensely disagreeable job, since the workmen would be compelled to use the pick upon their hands and knees, or lying down, and always with wet clothing, since it would not pay to clear out the hole to the size of a regular tunnel, but only to make a passage-way through which the water might escape from the interior of the mine; furthermore, the old tunnel, when it had been reached, must be somewhat cleared, to allow

of a proper passage of the water, in spite of the fact that it was an unsafe and unpleasant place to do work in.

Cheered by the thought of future success, all went at this disagreeable task with great alacrity, shortening the hours and avoiding all needless labor. As small a tube was made as it was possible to work in, but now and then a hard surface would require severe work, and these obstacles were dreaded, after the first experience, for behind them, when the shell was broken, would often be found a little cavity more or less full of water, which would gush out by the bucketful and once or twice threatened to drown the young miners like so many ground-squirrels in a burrow.

The distance they were obliged to go was only about thirty yards, and as they worked toward one another, from both ends, they made their way through in about ten days. It was a very irregular and unsafe hole, but it drained the rock almost perfectly and served

them afterward in another way quite as important.

As, by this new plan, a door was unnecessary on the Last Chance while it might possibly be wanted some day at the Aurora, it was removed and set up frame and all at the mouth of the other tunnel, which could now be locked if necessary. This door proved a benefit also, in helping them to regulate the draft of air.

The only incident worth recording that broke their daily loneliness and labor during all the month which had now nearly gone by, was the advent of a visitor, who appeared one evening about the time they had completed the cross-cut.

He was a tramping miner who said he had crossed the range from the South, and begged to be allowed to spend the night at their cabin. A man of decent appearance would have been welcomed gladly, but this applicant was an ill-featured, coarse-grained, blasphemous fellow, whom they disliked at

once, and yet could not well turn away. It was with great relief, therefore, that they saw him take his thin frame down the trail next morning. In addition to his disagreeable manner he had been much more inquisitive and prying than they liked, and had plainly shown himself angry because they had not made a full confidant of him.

Let us follow this visitor and find out more of his habits and associates. It is scarcely fair to condemn a man forever out of a single day's experience.

A DIME NOVEL HERO.

CHAPTER VII.

A DIME NOVEL HERO.

When their unpleasant guest departed from the cabin of our heroes, he marched straight down to Bob's cabin in the village and there found himself heartily welcomed. Old Bob introduced him to Scotty as "Bill Stevens—a fellow who knows the San Juan like his own barn-yard." Scotty said he was glad to see him, and no doubt he was, for he felt in need of friends, and this new man, as a chum of Bob's and evidently training in the same band, would of course become an ally of his. This Scotty needed; though he had not been sent out of town a second time, and was permitted to lounge around the El Dorado and to sit at the gambling-tables, or join the story-telling circles at the public corral, he saw that most of the men whom he met were

far from cordial toward him, and that his earnest efforts to be agreeable were of small avail in making friends. It did not suit his plans to resent this, nor to leave the camp in search of a more congenial community; so he put up with the unpopularity as well as he could. It galled him, however, and caused him to lay up hatred rather than love toward the whole population of the valley.

As soon as Bill Stevens' back was turned, Scotty took occasion to inquire somewhat about him. Bob really knew little of his history, except that, as he said, they had been "pards" in a little game some time previous, after which Stevens had thought it prudent to go away. Scotty pressed Old Bob to know the particulars of this partnership enterprise, but Bob declined at first to tell them. Finally, however, he exclaimed:

"Well, I s'pose you might as well know, its only another point against them dod-rotted young swells up the creek. The fact is, when Brehm and his partner lived down in that

there cabin 'cross the bridge yonder, Bushwick went off to Denver. By'n bye he came back with a heap o' cash—don' know how much—mebbe a thousand or so. 'Bout that time Bill came over to see me from t'other side the range, and I was telling about it, you know. Well Bill, he made out 's how Bushwick didn't have no right to the money no how, havin' stole it from somebody else by some kind of lawyer's game, and 'twas as much ours as his'n or anybody's, which of course that is true, providin' he got it by swindlin', which like enough he did, you know."

"So you and Bill held him up, did you?"

"No, we didn't have no chance to rob him on the road, but we thought we could get into his cabin easy enough. So we tried it, Stevens climbin' softly into the winder and I outside a-holdin' the ladder. He'd got e'en-a 'most in, when bang went a gun and out tumbled Bill on top o'me. I thought we was both killed sure, but Bill picked himself up,

and we lit out as though the Old Scratch himself was after us, which the same he mighty near was."

"Didn't hit Stevens, then?" Scotty inquired, with a grin which showed how well he enjoyed the comical side of the situation, and how little his conscience was touched by the villainy of the story.

"No, but it was an awful close call. Great Cæsar! But Max Brehm kin shoot, now you just bet!"

"Does Stevens know that the boys up the creek where he stopped t'other night are the same fellows?"

"I guess not; he aint said nothin' about it."

"If he did know, I reckon there'd be three of us as thought we owed the fine gentlemen a little debt of honor, which the same we hadn't ought, on no account, to fail to pay—eh?"

Scotty's leer and chuckle were as long as these slow and wicked words, and Bob's

squinty and bleary eye answered with a distorted, left-handed, evil grin of comprehension as he snarled out the laconic assent:

"Bet yer boots!"

And yet this is the kind of men whom so many well-meaning but romantically inclined eastern boys, knowing the far West only as they read of it in cheap books of a very poor sort, regard as heroes in disguise, and long to see and associate with. Thieves and gamblers at home are justly abhorred by them, yet the same man, perhaps, transplanted to the Rockies to escape the sheriff at home, becomes in these flashy books a sort of chivalrous knight whose uncouth ways only heighten his supposed virtues.

This is the worst of nonsense. A brave, heroic man does not show himself in this garb. The honest heroes of the Rockies never figure in dime novels and never will. They are not loud and "chinny" enough for that. They do not wear long hair, nor carry a big Kentucky rifle, nor appear and disappear

in any mysterious Jack-in-the-box manner. They are not accustomed to kill six or eight "red-skinned varmints" at a single blow, and if ever they are engaged in Indian warfare, are far too wise to get so surrounded by a circle of Indians that they are obliged to take a standing leap over the heads of their foes, as did Eagle-eye or some other scout I once read of. If they tried to behave in this way, or to dress in story-book fashion, they would be hung or driven out by men of action who have no time to spend watching Bowery-museum foolishness, and whose business would be harmed by its display.

There is in every mining district a class of men who behave more or less as these novels portray, going as far toward it, anyhow, leaving out some of the theatrical foolishness, as they dare; and I suppose they form the material out of which the writers of the sorry stuff try to make their heroes. But as a matter of fact they are lawless scamps, brutal, lowlived, ignorant, unclean men, with whom

not one in fifty of their admirers among the readers of these false and miserable tales would allow himself to be seen on the streets of the town where he was born. They are more noisy and more difficult to separate from their betters in the rough and unarranged surroundings of a new mining camp or cattle district, than they would be in an eastern village where the affairs of life are well classified; but they are none the less avoided and despised by good citizens, and are feared rather than trusted in any emergency, like an Indian war, which calls for courage and discretion.

I cannot conceive of a more complete disappointment and experience of fraud, than would meet the romantic reader of the Indian-slaying and horse-stealing tales in yellow covers, who should go on a search through the far West for the originals of those thrilling pictures.

Ruffianly men exist and attempt their wicked schemes among honest men, who, in

the absence of regular police protection, and at the great distance which many mines and ranches lie from courts, are often obliged to defend themselves as soldiers would in an enemy's country, or as any man has a right to do when attacked by robbers. But, boys, for the sake of all that is fair and square, let us call a ruffian a ruffian, and not attempt to see glory in the doings of a horse-thief, or a gambler, or a man who tries by force of rifle and pistol to seize upon property which does not belong to him.

While Scotty and Bob were discussing the achievements by which Mr. William Stevens, so called, had made himself distinguished, that worthy came in, bringing a new bag of cheap black tobacco. Filling their pipes, the three scallawags sat down in front of the coals smouldering in the adobe fireplace, and Bob immediately began to tell Stevens the names of the miners whose hospitality he enjoyed the night before, and how eager he ought to be to join the other two in a scheme

to break them down. Partly from ignorance, partly by design, they exaggerated to each other the injury each had suffered, and also the amount of plunder which it was likely might be obtained from the firm of B. B. & Co. The upshot of it all, was a compact between them to "get even" with the lads. This meant to rob them and drive them from the town, or, if it was at all necessary, to kill them, accounting for their crime by some artful story of self-defense or the like.

They were in no great hurry, however, to carry out their wicked purposes, and three or four days passed without their making any movement, since no plan suggested itself that seemed promising.

One evening Old Bob came home and remarked, as he took the coffee-mill between his knees and began to fill it from a buck-skin bag that hung against the chimney, that Morris had returned from below, and that he had talked with him a little.

"Did he say he loved ye?" inquired Scotty,

in sarcastic tones, and betraying a little uneasiness as to what might follow when Morris should hear of his return in defiance of the order of banishment.

"Wall—no, I reckon he's soured on me," was Bob's candid response. "But that didn't phase me. I wanted mighty bad to find out suthin', and I played sweet and boned him for the information."

"Did he play sweet, too, and tell ye?"

"Wall—no. But all the same I found out what I wanted. I let on I'd heard Jim Bowen was dead, and asked him was it true."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he glared at me, as though he was a bull buffalo and I was a ky-yote, 'n' just says 'dead and buried,' and then he marched off as if he'd been sent for. I'll get even with that sardine yet!"

This was a pretty accurate account of what really had passed between them. In fact, Morris had just been hunting with "Buckeye Jim" Bowen all that week, and knew he was

SCOTTY AND OLD BOB.

Silver Caves, Page 74.

as much alive as anybody had need to be; but Morris hated Bob, thought he had no business to be playing the hypocrite and asking questions about what was none of his affair, and so sent him off with this short and reckless answer, not thinking or caring how much Bob might believe of it.

"So the Terror's passed in his checks, eh?" was Scotty's comment. "He wasn't a bad sort of a party. I used to know him in Illinoy. They runned him off because they said he stole some horses,—fine nags they was, too. But it turned out he wasn't the feller after all. I could 'a' told 'em all the time they was wrong, only it wouldn't a'-been quite healthy."

"Why?" asked Stevens, whose wits were not of the quickest. "Did you know the right man?"

"I should smile! *I* stole them horses, pardner! But, Bob, what made you so anxious to know whether Buckeye Jim was dead?"

"Cause it fixes us O. K. The boys up

the creek are working his mine. I don't know whether they've got any show of right about it or not, but now Jim's dead I reckon they'd have hard work to keep it if we war to jump it."

Do you know what it is to jump a mine? It means simply to seize it without any right, and hold it by force, a thing very often successful when the first claimant has no legal title to the property.

Bob's proposition interested the others at once, and they began to discuss it eagerly. Stevens asserted that it was the middle one of the three mines at the head of the creek, namely the Aurora, that the boys were working. He confessed that he had not gone into it, but was sure that he was right. There was too much water in the upper tunnel near the cabin, he assured them, to do anything there.

"Don't you 'spose Morris knows that these boys have jumped Buckeye's mine?" asked Scotty, who remembered that Bowen partly owned the Aurora.

"Tain't likely," Bob answered. "But it will be just as well to keep him from findin' out they're in there, if we can, for fear of any interference. I reckon he feels friendly toward 'em by reason of helpin' him in your El Dorado scrape."

The very next morning, therefore, the three conspirators were thrown into a quiver of alarm, by seeing both Len and Max in town. Bob met them at the post-office, and loitered around, hoping, even if Morris should appear, that he might be able by some good chance to prevent their meeting. He thus heard Max tell the postmaster that they meant to stay in town until the next day, and took it for granted, from something else which he overheard, that the Scotchman had come in also, leaving the mine and cabin alone over-night.

The moment he heard this, Old Bob hastened to find his partners and to say that now was their opportunity to go up the creek, get a look at the property, and make a plan for capturing it. Scotty and Stevens agreed

that this was advisable, and borrowing horses, the three rattled up the road to Panther Creek as fast as possible, since no time ought to be wasted if they were to get back before sundown, and to travel on those mountain trails in the darkness is by no means a comfortable or safe proceeding.

HOW
LEN FOOLED THE PROFESSOR.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW LEN FOOLED THE PROFESSOR.

ENTIRELY unaware that Old Bob had regarded them with so much interest, or had been so glad to overhear the fact that they would spend the night in town, Len and Max hastened to finish their errands, and then to go about the principal business which had brought them on the long walk to town. In one important point their squint-eyed friend had misunderstood them badly,—Sandy had remained at the mine.

As soon as possible, therefore, the two young men took their way briskly down the familiar path which led to the home of an old fellow who was known in the camp as "Mr. Professor." His queer, solitary habits and sharp tongue had made him rather unpopular, but everyone acknowledged his ex-

pertness in judging ores, and his opinion was often sought by those who dared to face him.

"Are you sure you remember the shape of the specimens?" Max asked, for the twentieth time.

"As certain as anybody can be," Len replied confidently.

As they approached the professor's cabin, they saw that worthy chopping at a log beside it, whereupon they slackened their eager pace and sauntered up to his door with an air of unconcern.

"Good morning, Professor," said Len pleasantly.

"Mornin'," was the short reply, while the chips flew right and left.

"You must have learned how to chop in some good school," Max observed, in a tone expressing admiration.

"Raised in No'th Ca'lina," was the gruff response.

"Is that so?" Len exclaimed. "Why, that's not far from my home—I was raised

in Roanoke county, Virginia. Sorry I didn't know that before. I should have liked to come over and talked with you about things down in that region. Don't see many men out here that know much about the Piedmont country. Were you ever up in Roanoke?"

"Many a time."

Thus the ice was broken, and the lads won their way through the crust which this stern old miner was proud to wear, though it cut him off more and more from the society of those around him, who voted him an unsociable old curmudgeon that somehow had picked up a lot of information about rocks and ores.

Max did not smoke, but he had bought the best cigar he could get in town, for the special purpose of giving it to the old man, and this gift, with Len's pleasant chat, quite thawed the professor in the course of a quarter of an hour or so. Len was very diplomatic. He seemed to be in no hurry, but finally steered the conversation around

to rare minerals. Then, as if by chance, he recalled a package he had brought to the professor from Denver, on his return from that recent journey which Bob had alluded to in his conversation with Scotty, and asked the old man to show him the specimens again, and to tell him more about them than he had done on the evening when they were delivered.

Ordinarily a request like this would have met with refusal; but now the old man consented at once, and led the way into his cabin.

Many rude little shelves were stuck up against the log walls, upon which were heaped dusty rows of minerals and various other objects. One shelf contained several cigar-boxes. These the professor took down and opened one after another. Rummaging through half a dozen he finally found the one he wanted, and unfolded from their wrappings the five small bits of rock which Lennox had brought to him from Denver.

Selecting three of the specimens the professor took them to the light and began to talk about what they represented.

"That's an ore of tellurium," he said, holding one of the pieces between his thumb and finger, "and it carries gold,—or may sometimes—a right smart percentage of it, too—in the shape of a telluride. It is a very nice smelting ore and a valuable one."

"Is there much of it in the Rockies?" he was asked.

"Mighty little's been found yet, worse luck. It almost always occurs in veins with a lot of lead and other stuff, and everywhere I have ever seen it, it's alongside a porphyry dyke."

This last remark made Len's heart jump, but he showed no excitement. In a well-controlled voice he remarked that he wished they had a magnifying glass so that the professor might point out to them more effectively the peculiarities of the mineral, which he was turning over in his fingers.

"I've a good one," the old miner answered.

"I'll get it," and he stepped back into the cabin.

Instantly Len drew from his pocket three fragments of the brown rock taken from the deepest part of the Last Chance lode, and slipped the Denver specimens out of sight. He thought the change would not be noticed; certainly there was no difference between the former and latter specimens discernible to a careless eye, and if they deceived this expert, he might feel sure that his pieces of ore were as truly tellurium as were the others.

The professor came out wiping the lenses of a small but powerful magnifier upon the lining of his old coat. Taking one of the changed specimens unsuspectingly from Len's hand, he began to scrutinize it very carefully under the microscope.

"By George," he exclaimed, "that's a bully specimen! I wonder where Pete,"—his Denver aquaintance,—"got it. I never saw anything richer in tellurides."

Then he took the other pieces and examined those in the same way. "Guess the glass must 'a' been dusty when I looked at 'em before," he muttered, as he handed them and the magnifier to Len that he might study them; and then he went on to say what were the particles to be seen in the rusty rock which denoted the presence of telluride of gold, and that certain other black spots, filling small cavities, seemed to be carbonate of lead, which might contain silver.

"Well," he remarked, as the boys finished their examination, "If Pete's got a mine of that stuff he ought to be a rich man pretty soon. It'll assay mighty high, or I don't know coals from chalk."

To re-exchange the specimens and give the professor his own back again, was a matter of no great difficulty while they talked, and as both the lads were eager to get away by themselves and sing a song over their tokens

of success, it was not long before they took their leave,—the warmth of that proceeding causing the old miner considerable astonishment.

"Darned queer fellows, them," he said to himself, as he watched them go down the road very sedately for a little way, then suddenly fall to shaking one another by both hands and slapping one another's backs.

"Bet you they've been a leetle too long at the El Dorado," he suggested aloud to himself, as there was no other auditor; and Himself quite agreed with the speaker. "Now just look at that!"

They danced and chorused their *yah, yahs!* till they were out of breath, an ending not long delayed in the thin air of the high Rockies. And as the aged and weather-beaten wanderer looked at them, he felt such an attack of memory, and suffered such twinges of boyish feeling, as had not pierced his cynical old frame in many and many a day.

"They're way-up boys!" he exclaimed to himself. "I hope they'll get the drop on that cantankerous old female they call Fortune,—and I reckon they will!"

SANDY McKINNON'S EAVES-DROPPING.

CHAPTER IX.

SANDY MCKINNON'S EAVESDROPPING.

TAKING the absence of Max and Len as a holiday, Sandy locked the tunnel entrance, pulled the house-door shut (it never had a lock), and started off on a long tramp up the mountain, within an hour after his partners left the cabin. He carried his rifle, intent upon both game and glory, for apart from the desire for fresh venison in the larder, he thought it would be a fine thing to go back some day to Scotland and tell how, single-handed, he had met and killed a grizzly bear on some snowy pinnacle of the wild Sierra San Juan.

He walked far and reached a great elevation. He looked abroad upon magnificent pictures, shot an elk and some smaller animals, and had a variety of interesting experiences, though he got no nearer a grizzly

than to catch sight of one on the further side of an impassable chasm. But these adventures do not come into our story, which was resumed in his surprising experiences that afternoon.

Turning homeward, when warned to do so by the declining sun, he was caught in a thunder-shower, which, at the great altitude where it encountered him, meant a deluge of sleet, hail, and most uncomfortably cold rain. Drenched, sore and shivering, Sandy made his way as rapidly as he was able down toward the crest of the cliff under which the cabin was sheltered. In the foggy condition of the air,—to those in the valley this fog was a rain-cloud,—and in his weary and half-dazed state, he passed beyond the point where the faint trail led down the precipice; but early discovering his error, turned back, creeping slowly along the brink of the ledge in search of it.

He had scarcely begun the search, however, when he was startled by the sound of

human voices. The first thought was that his partners had come back. The next instant, however, he perceived that the voices were strange to him, and with cautious curiosity he crept stealthily to the bushy brink and peered over the low cliff.

He found himself squarely above the entrance to the Aurora, which was hardly fifty feet beneath him. Three rough men were standing on the dump in front of the tunnel, trying to open the door, but it stood firm under their pulling. They tried some keys, but none would fit the lock, and Sandy grinned as he thought of something his grandfather used to say,—"Lock your door that you may keep your neighbor honest."

"Let's smash it!" exclaimed the smallest of the three, whom we know to be Stevens.

At the sound of his voice Sandy pricked up his ears; he was sure it must be the same man who had spent a night at their cabin a few days before, and stolen the knife. He

could not see their faces, however, because of his position and their slouched hats.

"No," objected the tallest, whose voice also seemed vaguely familiar to the listener —"No, we don't want 'em to know we've been here; leave no traces to set 'em a-watching. We musn't disturb nothing, and we must get out o' here as soon as we can, so's not to be caught prospectin' their trail. What we want is to surprise 'em some fine mornin', when they aint lookin' for no visitors, drop on 'em like a gobbler on a June-bug. . I reckon there'll be some regular squealing fun 'bout that time, eh, old pard!" and Scotty banged the rheumatic back of his squint-eyed companion in a way that made Bob howl, and did Sandy's heart good.

"You bet!" echoed Stevens, "and wont there be a racket afterward! I aint had a real red-hot blow-out in a coon's age—I say, pard, it'll be at my expense, remember, all at my expense. I'll have the money and I'll spend it too, you'll see!"

"Nae doot," was Sandy's inward soliloquy overhead; "but I'm thinkin' ye're cawking the claith ere the wab be in the loom."

"Oh, dry up!" came the gambler's rejoinder. "You're a fool! You haven't got inside the mine yet. Now, mates, I reckon this is our best lay: To-day is Wednesday. We need time to get an outfit to live on cached near here, somewheres, so that after we've captured the place we can hold the fort for a little while, if they should come back at us. You see we've got to give 'em back their grub and furniture, cause if we take that it's *steal-in'*, and we aint no thieves, leastwise not in this deal."

"A liar should hae a gude memory," thought Sandy.

"And, besides, they could drop on us for that, whereas this is a free country and we've a perfect right to jump a man's claim—"

"Pervided we kin hold it!" Old Bob interrupted.

"Yes, of course. Well, as I was a-saying,

to-day's Wednesday; and I reckon Saturday night's about our figure. We'll come up here in the evening, and then along about twelve o'clock we'll capture this 'ere mine, and then bounce 'em right out o' their beds and send 'em down the cañon. Next day, if they're civil, we'll give 'em their blankets and notice to leave. And if they aint civil—"

The villain paused and glared right and left at his companions, with a satanic grin on his face. Slowly drawing from the leg of his rust-red cowhide boot a huge knife, he finished the sentence with slow and venomous emphasis,—

"We'll give 'em this!"

After that boodthirsty remark the three conspirators rose from their seats and scrambled down the farther slope of the dump.

So cold and stiff was the young Highlander with lying in wet clothes upon the rough rocks, that at first he could hardly travel; but slowly picking his way down to the cabin he made haste first to build a fire, and after

"WE'LL GIVE 'EM THIS."

Silver Caves, Page 98.

giving himself a brisk rubbing, to put on dry clothing, so that no ill result ensued.

He did not enjoy that night, alone among those storm-breeding heights, nearly as much as he had expected to, yet quickly fell asleep, not to awake until rather late on the following morning.

Hurrying through breakfast, he set off at once down the trail in hope of meeting Max and Len, for he thought it important to gain every moment between that and Saturday in the effort to forestall the enemy.

FACING THE NEW SITUATION.

CHAPTER X.

FACING THE NEW SITUATION.

SANDY'S partners, meanwhile, having left the village as early as possible, had made so good progress that the three met at about the half-way point.

"Hello!" Len sang out gaily, as he caught sight of Sandy, "here's our canny Scot! But why makest thou such a walking arsenal of thyself? 'Fraid of Injuns?"

"Weel," was the slow reply, as the tall son of Saint Andrew glanced down at himself, "he needs a long shankit spoon wha sups kail wi' the deil. I'm no likin' neeknames as a rule, but may be ye're no far wrang when you ca' me an arsenal. Did ye obsairve the new trick I've learned?"

Stooping down, while the twinkle in his eyes belied the gravity of his face, he

solemnly pulled from his boot-leg the long butcher-knife with which the boys were wont to slice their bacon.

This was too much. Both tumbled upon the nearest bed of moss and made the rocky walls ring with shouts of laughter, but Sandy remained as grave as an undertaker.

"Laugh at leisure, ye may greet ere e'en," he said in his proverbial style, adding, when they had checked their merriment, "Now if you're wantin' to hear a vera pretty tale, why I'm willin' to tell ye, though you've not been ower respectfu' to a puir body during the last five minutes or so."

"Oh, go on Sandy, go on. We don't mind you're making yourself a scalp hunter from the wild west, if you like it. Go on, let's have your story. What sort of a mare's nest have you found this time?"

"I'm not sure ye quite heard my remark aboot bein' respectfu'; an' if I ha' foond a mare's nest, I'm thinking ye'll find yoursel' unco eenterested in the aiggs."

After this parting shot Sandy began to tell what he had seen and heard, as he lay on the edge of the cliff. Two of the men he knew, as we have seen, and his description of the third at once identified him in the minds of the rest as Old Bob.

"So that's where you learned to carry a knife in your boot is it?"

"Ay," admitted Sandy, "That's where I learned it. I was tickled, dinna ye ken, wi' the idea that a man like him, hating me as he did, should be teachin' me sumthin'."

"But that's no way to carry a knife," Max interrupted with fine contempt. "At least no gentleman would do so, though a gambler might."

"How then?" asked Sandy, considerably crest-fallen. "Where does a *gentleman* usually carry his bowie-knife?"

"Down the back of his neck."

"Weel, weel, what would my old grandmither up in Dundee say to that! This is what I'm thinkin' she would remark, that a

wise man gets learnin' frae them that has nane to themsel's."

This ten-strike scored to Scotch credit, they settled down again to their study of the new situation, the full meaning of which grew upon them as they talked it over.

"It strikes me," said Sandy, "that it wad be a gude thing if Bushwick were to go directly back to town and see that Mr. Morris. Perhaps, considerin' a' the saircumstances, he would watch the rascals a wee bit. I suppose he's na ower-fond o' that blackleg, and maybe he wad come up on Saturday night, and so gie us a bit o' help if we happened to be needin' it. Meanwhile Brehm an' mysel' will put our castle in a state o' defense, as it were."

This course was decided upon. Len unslung his load of groceries, ammunition, the ever-welcome mail, and other purchases, and it was shouldered by Sandy, who gave him in return one of his pistols. Then Len started back toward town, caring little for the extra walk.

The other two lads meanwhile hastened home, busily talking as they strode along.

Max recounted how Lennox had secured an entirely unbiased judgment from the old miner, who had assured them positively that the brown stuff which had been so long the object of their attention was certainly a telluride ore of gold, and apparently a rich one.

"Ay, that sounds well," Sandy assented, "but can you be quite certain this Professor, as you dub him, kens well what he's talkin' aboot?"

"I think he does," Max assured his friend, and gave his reason.

"But how has it escaped notice heretofore?" the Scotchman persisted.

"It's an extremely uncommon ore in northern Colorado, where most of the mining has been done up to this time, and few of our citizens have ever seen it. Moreover, I suppose the early prospectors here were looking wholly for chlorides, or sulphurets, or ruby silver, or some other well known ores of that

sort, and this is like none of these, or any other silver indication I know of. But if they had gone a little deeper, I am inclined to think they'd have found plenty of that, too, and consequently, that we would never have got possession of this prospect hole."

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, I judge so from the way the rock looks."

"Then you think we may strike a silver ore in addition to this telluride of gold?"

"Don't know, can't see into the ground further'n your pick-point. Sorry I didn't get a letter from the Denver assayer, to whom we sent our specimens for analysis. I expected to have heard from him by this time."

As they neared the house they fell to discussing what it would be best to do toward preparing for their unwelcome visitors. Sandy asked why they could not have Old Bob and his crew arrested, whereupon Max explained the loose condition of legal matters in that country, and that they had no ground

to stand a trial upon. Sandy had no witnesses to threats he had heard. They could not legally prevent any one from going on the Aurora dump, or into the Aurora tunnel, or even from staying in it, since it was not their property, and they themselves were there only by permission. This gave them no rights which they could defend without blame.

"But we have such rights in the Last Chance premises," Sandy persisted, "and can protect that?"

"Yes, but in this region it would be a poor plan to call in the sheriff, at any rate before we're attacked; and when the attack comes on I reckon the sight of that knife-handle sticking out of your boot-leg will keep 'em off better than all the sheriffs in the San Juan. By the way, I can find a second bowie for the other boot if you want it!"

"Not this moment, thank'ee. Then as I understand, you mean to let 'em take the Aurora, but you'll fight for the Last Chance and the cabin, our hearthstone, as it were?"

"Yes, I don't see what else we can do. It would be difficult to defend both if we tried, and when they get possession of the Aurora I fancy they wont go to any great trouble or risk to wrest this from us. You see they believe it is the Aurora we are working and that there the riches lie. I don't believe they have a hint of the cross-cut or the real state of things, do you?"

"Not to judge by what I overheard yesterday. But once they get possession of the Aurora entrance, wont they be able to find it all out in a few minutes, and seize on the cross-cut and the new work? Our army is rather sma' to garrison the mine-chamber and the cabin too; besides, how can we get in or out, if they hauld the entrance? I'm 'fraid, my friend, ye're biting off mair than your cheeks 'll hold."

"Not at all. Come with me and I'll show you how I mean to begin a flank movement on the enemy."

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR.

CHAPTER XI.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR.

SCHEMES looking toward the same object were at the same time busily advancing down at the camp.

Len had made his way back as rapidly as possible, and fortunately met Morris just as he was riding away into the mountains to be gone over night. He explained to him the whole situation, excepting that interview at the Professor's, and at once enlisted his sympathy and interest. This was doubled when he heard that the real leader of the would-be jumpers was his antagonist in that El Dorado affair of which we have heard, whose overthrow would give him much satisfaction. He promised, therefore, that he would watch the three rascals sharply, and would certainly be on hand if they made any attempt to carry out their plans.

"More'n that," he said, "I shouldn't wonder if Buckeye Jim would be there too. That was all bosh, of course, that I told Bob about his being dead. I didn't suppose the old fool'd swallow it as slick as he did. All the boys know he's 'live and hearty, and he wrote me he was coming up here in a few days. If he's on hand I 'low there'll be some fun."

"I hope there wont be any fighting," said Len.

"Oh, of course, we all hope that; we're all men of peace up here! All the same, if we should happen to want to shoot at a mark on t'other dump, or something of that kind, for a little amusement, after supper, you know, why it would do any fellow proud that happened to be over there, to kind o' lay low, don't you see, for fear of stray bullets, cause Jim and me shoots kind o' free when once we turn loose."

And having delivered himself of this long and oracular speech, Morris shook hands and turned his broncho's head up hill.

Len might now have gone home, but he thought it worth while, as another mail would come in soon, to wait for possible letters, or what were even more desirable, the newspapers and magazines that his far-away people at home sent with pleasant frequency. He was rewarded by a bundle of these, and one letter, addressed to Max. It bore the card of the Denver assayer to whom specimens of the ore from the interior of the Last Chance had been sent for analysis. Perhaps it might dash their hopes, and his hand trembled a little as he put it away in his pocket. Then he tied the newspapers in his rubber coat, flung it over his shoulder, and had turned his face homeward, when a thought struck him.

Going back, he walked round the corner to the office of the Bull Pup mine, which had been bought, and was now operated, by a Mr. Anderson, the same eastern capitalist whose refusal to buy Old Bob's prospect had been the beginning of Max's adventures and

our history, Len's intention was to ask the agent whether Mr. Anderson was expected at the camp soon, and what was his present address.

In response to these questions he learned that Mr. Anderson would arrive ten days hence, and that meanwhile he could be communicated with at Denver.

"I think, if you will let me sit down here a moment, I will write a letter to him," said Lennox.

"Certainly," the agent replied, and gave him pen and paper.

His letter was a short one. It merely recalled Max Brehm and himself to Mr. Anderson's recollection, stated that they had opened a prospect tunnel wherein they believed they had discovered good indications of a new and valuable sort of gold ore in paying quantities, and begged him to come and see it as soon as he could, with a view of buying a part of it, or otherwise helping them to develop the mine.

This done, Len lost no time in leaving town.

Not a sign of either of the three blacklegs had he seen all day, and when on his way out he passed Old Bob's cabin, it was dark and silent.

In fact these worthies were not in town, but early in the morning had gone up the creek with two pack-loads of tools, provisions, and so on, which they cached at Bob's old prospect-hole, the Cardinal, in order to have them convenient after they had jumped the Aurora and had driven B. B. & Co., dead or alive, out of the cañon.

A new moon was just holding its sickle over the notch in the mountains toward which the cañon opened, when Len reached the cabin, where his tired partners were getting supper; and he was glad to learn, a little later, that they approved his course in writing the letter to Mr. Anderson.

Two days remained before the expected attack, and the firm agreed that out of these must be squeezed all possible advantage, by

double work. This was a time when, if their fortune was to be made, or even if the results already achieved were to be saved, every effort must be put forth. They had wit enough to see that whether the Last Chance held a fortune, or contained nothing, it would never do to relinquish it at this stage of trial.

Men who were on the threshold of success have failed to attain it often because of the want of sagacity to understand, and of energy and self-sacrifice to work hard, at just such a crisis as this. The next man, seizing with a firm grip, and holding his chances at every risk until the opposition has vanished, finds a great reward.

But in order that our friends might hold on to their property it was necessary to put it on a war footing. Their way of operating the mine through the Aurora's tunnel must be abandoned, of course, unless they proposed to defend that, too, which they could not do, as they had no legal rights there. The plan proposed, then, was to en-

large the waterway through their own vein into a tunnel of serviceable size, and at the same time to turn the stream of water into the Aurora, and drain the whole of the remoter part of the mine out that way.

They abandoned their arrangement of two-hour stints, and all worked together just as hard as they knew how.

Going into the interior chamber of the mine, they first dug a drain through the cross-cut, and then, as fast as they tore down the rock in enlarging their own tunnel outward, it was heaped up in the cross-cut; for they wished to block that up completely. By Friday night this barrier was almost built.

All were stiff and sore when they arose at daybreak on Saturday morning, but each knew they could not afford to spare themselves, and that this one day's hardship might be repaid tenfold.

Before noon they tapped the main fountain, and brought its stream, which would

have measured a foot wide and a foot deep, into their new drain.

When this great point had been gained, they felt that the worst was over, and by night they had finished barricading the cross-cut. They were obliged that evening, when their day's work was done, to worm their way out to daylight through the narrow, ragged, insecure, and still dripping waterway which threaded the Last Chance, but was by no means a tunnel in any proper sense of the word, nor a safe place for a man to work in.

Lennox, who was of slighter build, and at the same time of more enthusiatic temperament than his associates, was entirely used up when he reached daylight, and could only fall down and lie still. Fortunately for him, however, Sandy and Max had strength enough left to cook supper.

While they were eating supper, and before darkness had come, the three young miners were startled by a loud hallo, and on running

to the door saw Morris sitting on horseback at the foot of the dump.

"Can I ride up?" he called out.

"No, leave your nag down there. I'll show you later how to get him around behind the cabin, where there is some pasture."

So Morris drew the bridle reins over his horse's head and let them hang down from the bit, knowing that by this sign the horse would understand that he was to stay where he was until his rider returned. Then he scrambled up the rough side of the dump, saying, as he reached the top and shook hands with Max:

"Well, you needn't worry over any jumpers to-night."

"Why," exclaimed Len. "What's up?"

"Oh, the regular thing with that crowd. The minute they got a little excited over a scheme, they had to go and drink a lot o' whisky on it, and there they are, sittin' round the El Dorado, stupid as ground-hogs. That is, two of 'em are; that beauty they call

Scotty was a-begging to fight all hands when I came away. I reckon somebody 'll accommodate him before midnight."

"An' did ye say he's called Scotty?" asked Sandy, appearing in the doorway of the cabin for the first time.

"Yes,—why, hello, stranger! *You* know the El Dorado, when you see it, don't you? How are you," extending his hand with great cordiality, "put it thar! I shouldn't wonder if we could pull a double team when it comes to layin' out that same gambler from over the range, eh?"

"Weel, we hae done something o' the kind a'ready, Mr. Morris, an' I dare say he's no in love wi' eyther of us."

"Not he. He'd like nothing better than to blow up the whole of us with giant powder. Now how are you fellows going to handle this crowd when they do try it on? I thought if you didn't mind I'd stay and see the fun. Likely enough I could help you some. When my Winchester here

turns loose people 'd better stand one side!"

So they explained to him how they had used the Aurora as a new means of entrance to their mine, the cutting of the cross-cut through the dyke, and the way they had closed this approach by turning all the water into the other tunnel and barricading the cross-cut.

"You see we had no right in the Aurora, and couldn't fairly fight for it. So we made up our minds to let 'em jump that and welcome."

"But I have rights there—Jim and I own that together, and you've done enough work on it to keep up the assessment, so that it's ours, and nobody can jump it while I'm around, unless they're a heap stronger 'n I am."

They argued with Morris as to the uselessness of this resolution. He admitted that the Aurora wasn't worth fighting over, but urged that it riled him to have it drop into

the clutches of such small potatoes as Old Bob and his pals.

Finally, however, it was agreed that the question of defending the Aurora should be left until the attacking party appeared ; and, meanwhile, that they would devote themselves to getting their own property into still better shape.

That night, relieved of the strain of watching, they had a long and refreshing sleep, continued until far into the morning, for this was Sunday.

The day of rest passed quietly.

Early on Monday they were at work again, Morris helping. Two had picks and labored in the interior of the tunnel, enlarging the passage-way. A third shoveled the rock torn down into a wheelbarrow and carried it part way out, where the fourth gave him an empty wheelbarrow, took his full one, and dumped the débris at the mouth of the mine.

By this arrangement somebody was outside nearly all the time and could watch against

any surprise from the enemy, at the same time contributing his share of labor.

All of Tuesday and Wednesday they were undisturbed, and made such good progress that by Wednesday evening a man could pass readily into the farthest part of the mine, the barricade protecting the cross-cut easily against any enemy who could get to it by way of the flooded Aurora. It was a great gain in another direction, too, for they were expecting Mr. Anderson, and could now show him the whole length of the mine.

THE ENEMY APPEARS.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ENEMY APPEARS.

On Wednesday afternoon Len stopped work a little earlier than the others, though it was quite dusk, and left the mine to get supper. Turning his gaze down the cañon, the moment he came to the mouth of the tunnel, he saw three men on horseback riding up the trail nearly a mile away. It was merely by good chance that he happened to catch a glimpse of them, for had he been a moment later they would have been out of sight, not to reappear until the ford of the creek was reached, which was only a few yards beyond the foot of the Aurora dump.

Dropping his shovel he ran back and reported, whereupon all hands hastened to the mouth of the tunnel, and lay down behind a rough sort of wall of loose rocks which had

been heaped up in front of the cabin in clearing the space around the door.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed, and the twilight was fast becoming dense in the cañon, though on the mountain-tops a full blaze of light glowed strong and red, bringing out every glorious feature of the white-headed old peaks.

Soon was heard the stumbling clatter, not loud, yet distinct enough, of horses' shodden feet on the stony path, and, as the riders came nearer, the faint sound of human voices. A moment after this the three figures came into view, riding cautiously through the ford, peering right and left, with guns in readiness, as though fearful of ambuscades. A few steps further took them out of sight behind the jutting headland of the Aurora dump.

Then came sounds denoting that the jumpers had dismounted and were unsaddling. The clatter of the heavy wooden stirrups echoed along the rocky walls of the narrow gulch as the saddles were flung down.

After a short interval of silence, it became plain, by the rattle of rolling stones, that the invaders were charging up the dump. Instead of trying to steal to the top, they sprang up as fast as they could scramble.

"It's evident," whispered Sandy, "that they're expectin' to catch us in that tunnel like a fox wi' his 'earth' stopped. But it's a puir fox that has na mair than one hole to his burrow!"

Sandy seemed to have hit it, for their first act, when Bob, Scotty and Stevens had reached the crest, and found no one there, was to rush to the door as though to shut it and fasten it.

Imagine their chagrin when they saw that it was already closed, and that a great quantity of water was rushing out under the sill. They pointed one another to it, as though asserting that nobody could work in a tunnel which was as nearly flooded as that. Still, to make matters quite sure, they began to heap great rocks at the door and kept at it until no

three giants, much less our not over stalwart friends, could have forced it open.

It was vastly amusing to the spectators to see these men, who were more distinguished for their laziness than for their energy, toil at the big stones, and when, having made sure they'd secured full possession of the place, they sat down and wiped their brows, Max and Len and Sandy suddenly rose up and wished them good-evening.

"Thought you'd tree'd us in that hole, eh?" Len sings out with a sneering laugh. "Not much! We've been waiting for you fellows half the week. Why didn't you come up Saturday night as you promised?"

Astounded and angry, the three ruffians hurled back a lot of brag and bad language, the substance of which was that nobody dare come and take back the Aurora.

They replied with a laugh, and went in with a parting shot in broad Scotch: "It's the life o' an auld hat to be weel cockit."

Morris had already sneaked into the house and was slicing bacon for supper.

"I'll lay low for the present, I reckon," he said, "'t wont do no harm, and it may be worth something to let those fellows think you're alone."

A few moments later Sandy stepped out, and was amazed to find two of the adversaries stealing up the bank beside the cabin.

His alarm brought Max and Len in a hurry, and when they found themselves discovered the roughs retreated in great haste and a cloud of wrathful phrases, while Max shouted: "Hereafter we shall be watching, and it wont be healthy for any man to set foot on this side of the gulch."

"Those men mean business, for sure," Morris asserted, and added this counsel: "We musn't show ourselves any mor'n we can help, and especially at night by the firelight. And it wouldn't be a bad idea to make a better breastwork when it gets so dark they can't see what we're doing."

"We might hang blankets on the wall along that side of the cabin, so that no one could see to shoot through the chinks," Len suggested.

"Yes, that's a good scheme, and somebody must be on watch night and day lest they play some trick on us. I don't think they'll shoot in the daytime, but I'll bet they 'll take the first chance at night they can get. I tell you, gentlemen, not only your mine, but your *lives* are at stake in this yere scrimmage, and it'll stand you in hand to take mighty good care of 'em."

This was from Morris and was sober talk, but seemed to be no less than the truth, considering the character of the desperadoes.

Acting upon the suggestion, in his prompt, quiet way, Max remarked that he would take the first watch, and going to the door of the cabin which, it will be remembered, looked down the cañon, and hence faced the Aurora, opened it and started to pass out.

Before he could step across the threshold, a

faint report rang out, not loud nor sharp, for the air was too thin to let much noise be made, and with an audible *ping* a bullet splintered the log over the door.

Max dropped so quickly his chums thought for an instant he must have been hurt, but he shouted "Keep back! Keep back!" and at once began to wriggle forward under cover of the wall toward the brink of the dump.

Dropping on hands and knees they followed him, and a few seconds later all four were lying behind the pile of stones, peering out into the gloom.

Nothing could be seen, or even heard, for a time, but presently muttered talking was detected on the other hillock and our friends concluded that the shot did not mean an attack, but had been fired, sharpshooter fashion, when Max exposed himself in the brightly lighted doorway. The enemy's camp had evidently been made down behind the shelter of the dump, as was shown by the light re-

flected from the fire, but neither the blaze nor its kindlers were visible, so that the compliment of the shot could not have been returned had our boys felt so disposed.

"I make no doot they're watching us as shairp as we're peerin' at them," whispered Sandy; "and the sooner we improve our fortifications, the better."

Max watched until midnight, then crept softly to where Morris was stretched upon the cabin floor and asked him to take his place; but nothing disturbed them, and the next morning two of the boys went to their work in the mine, leaving two outside on guard. These improved their time in strengthening the breastwork and in curtaining with blankets that wall of the cabin. In the afternoon they exchanged places with the men in the tunnel.

The jumpers were seen about the Aurora, but nothing was said to them. They broke down the mine door, and penetrated the tunnel a short distance, but soon returned, discouraged by the wetness within.

The night passed quietly and Friday morning went by without any incident. About the middle of the afternoon, while Len and Sandy were outside, Old Bob and Scotty came to the edge of the Aurora dump, and held aloft a pole with a handkerchief, supposed to be white, tied upon it, which they waved toward the cabin.

"What do you mean by that?" Len sung out, for he and Sandy happened to be on duty as sentinels.

"Flag o' truce," Bob yelled back. "One o' you fellers come down in the hollow and meet me. I want to talk. Leave yer gun behind. I aint got no arms, you see. Will you come?"

"I reckon. Hold on, I'll see my partner!"

Len lighted a little lamp and disappeared into the mine, whence he returned in five minutes. Max and Morris came as far as the door, but did not show themselves.

"All right," Len called out, as he blew out his lamp and climbed over the breastwork.

"Come down in the hollow if you want to talk."

Old Bob moved clumsily down from the Aurora to meet him, while Sandy perched himself on the wall and Bob's friends stood behind him on their own knoll.

A FLAG OF TRUCE.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FLAG OF TRUCE.

The younger man reached the bottom the sooner, and sitting down began to shy pebbles at a bowlder a few yards below, to see how far they would glance.

Bob came lumbering down the slope of loose stones, took a seat pretty near Len, and slowly drawing his knife from his pocket, opened it with great deliberation and began to whittle at a bit of spruce bark.

Nothing was said for some time, and neither took any notice of the other. Each was waiting for his opponent to begin. At last the eager disposition of the young Virginian, who never could bear to waste time in going about whatever he had to do, and who in consequence had often exemplified the maxim "more haste less speed," overcame his reserve and broke the silence.

"Well, Bob," he began in a careless manner, "I never expected to see you in as mean a scrape as this."

If our embassador had studied over it for a week, he could not have made a remark which would better serve his purpose. Bob had long deemed himself a very wily old dog indeed. He had boasted of this to his associates more than once, and had assured them that they would see how, on this occasion, he would "argify and bamboozle that young cub of a Bushwick" until, figuratively speaking, he had tied him all up in a bundle and laid him away on a shelf in safe storage.

But Len's cool remark, driving straight home to the very heart and spirit of all his pretensions, let the wind out of Old Bob's behavior and arguments together. It angered him in an instant, and when a diplomat gets angry he loses his power. Instead of the soft words and sly reasoning by which he had hoped to fool his antagonist into opening his doors to the treachery which it was intended

should follow ; instead of the pretty speeches which Bob had carefully thought out and talked over, came furious retorts, bad language, and threats, to which Len listened with the utmost composure.

The substance of it all was, that Bob and his precious accomplices had jumped the mine, and yet they hadn't jumped it, rightly speaking, because they had as much right there as anybody. The claim had been abandoned, and if anybody had gone to work at it why that was at their own risk, and they mustn't complain when another man came along and took it away from the first party.

"Now I've got this yere 'Rora mine," Bob shouted excitedly, "and I'm goin' to keep it, don't you forget that! An' wot's more, my friend Mr. Stevens is agoin' to jump that claim you're holdin' now, 'n' that cabin. That cabin belonged to my friend Pickens, 'n' he told me, before he went away, that if I wanted it I could have it, and I can prove it."

"Now," Bob kept on, "you young roosters 'd better give up and crawl out. We'll give you a chance to get away and take your blankets and things if you'll quit peaceable-like and git out. We don't want no trouble, nor nobody hurted."

"Then why did you put a ball into our doorpost?" interrupted his listener.

"Scotty did that. I told him 't wa'n't on the squar, an' 'twas kinder haxidental anyhow. If you'll quit shootin' at us we wont shoot at you,—an' *I* wouldn't nohow."

"We haven't fired a shot."

"You're jist ready to all the time," Bob persisted, "so 's we gentlemen can't work our property for fear of you."

"You 'gentlemen'! Your 'property'!" repeated Lennox, with infinite scorn.

"Yes, ours. And, as I was sayin', we'll go to town and get help, if we arn't enough alone, and we'll bounce you out o' that cabin which we want for ourselves, and you may thank your stars if you get out with whole

skins. The hull filin' of ye must pack up and scoot 'fore sundown."

"That's rather sudden," Len pleaded; "can't you give us till to-morrow morning? It looks like it was going to rain to-night."

"Well, we don't want to be rough on young chaps like you, though you're too cheeky for these parts," Bob conceded, thinking he had frightened the lad; "and we wont crowd ye to-night. But, by this, that and the other! if you don't skip out early to-morrow you'll hear from us, you bet!"

"All right!" Len rejoined. "I'll tell the boys. I'm glad you gave us till to-morrow to get out, for it looks mighty like a storm to-night."

It required only a very brief report from Lennox to acquaint the firm with what Bob had threatened, and, no doubt, would try to carry out.

"They have no suspicion," Len asserted, "that Morris is with us, and it will be a good thing if we can continue to keep it secret."

"They'll find it out mighty sudden and pointed-like," muttered Morris, "if they don't play cautious."

There was a pause for a moment or two, until Len remarked that he supposed something should be said, or the enemy would think they intended to act upon Bob's bluster and abandon the claim, "which, of course, nobody thinks of doing for an instant."

"I understand it's ours, fair and square," said Sandy, "and sin' possession's nine points of the law, we might as well haud on for the other point. I remember that my grandfeyther used to say to us bairns,—'better to keep the deil wi'oot the door, than drive him oot o' the hoose.' I'm thinking, though, I'd like to take that gambler-man by the nape of his neck and gie him the name of an auld Scotch dance down the bank,—I mean the Highland *fling*, ye ken?"

Max did not join in the laugh; in his despondent way, he was filled with hesitation which none of the others felt. Had he been

quite alone, I'm not sure how much he might have wavered, postponed, and yielded; but while all were waiting for him to say something, a shout came across from the other dump:

"What're you fellers a-goin' to do?"

Len was roused. The indignation he had repressed hitherto now came to the surface.

"I'll show those miserable sneaks that they can't bluff *me!*" he exclaimed; and springing upon a heap of stones, he yelled back:

"You know you lied about your right to this mine. We bought it and we're going to keep it. If you want it you've got to take it, and you'd better look right sharp after your own stake. This is 'what we're a-goin' to do!'"

"Well," said Max, as the excited lad leaped down out of rifle-range, "you've declared war for certain, and I imagine we'll have to fight it out on this line if it takes all—"

"Don't say 'summer'; there's snow and frost enough in this wind to furnish a Virginia January."

"Well—all Winter, then. But they wont try it on—they know better."

Evidently Max's indecisions were over.

"No," Morris agreed, "I don't think they'll attack by themselves, but they can make about as much trouble for you by simply staying there."

"Besides," Sandy put in, "one of 'em 'll start to town as soon as it comes dark, and na doot can find plenty o' their own kind, who wad like na better sport than to join in a scheme o' this nature."

"I can put a stop to that," said Morris.

"How?"

"Nobody 'll try to get away till night, and by that time I'll be down there to stop him, whoever he is, and send him back again with a flea in his ear."

"How will you get down the cañon without their spotting you?"

"I'll climb up the cliff and work my way down about a quarter of a mile away. I know a spot that'll suit me to a T. I wish

Buckeye Jim was here, we'd make a break for those jumpers and clean out the whole nest in no time. He'd ought to a' been here before this. Mebbe he's in town now—there's no telling."

"Likely enough Mr. Anderson is there by this time, too," said Len.

"Why, would it not be a good plan, borrowing a hint from the adversary, for one of us to go to town and be ready to hasten these gentlemen, or perhaps get assistance otherwise?"

It was Sandy who made this suggestion, to which, at first, there was only silent attention.

"I'm thinkin' that the three of us left can stand off, as ye say, those fellows yonder, and if we can manage to hold 'em all in, our agent would come back with an overwhelming force and put 'em wholly to rout."

"I guess you're right, Sandy—but who shall go?"

"Weel, I'm vera willing to do that, or anything as ye weel ken, but I'm so much of a

stranger in town, that probably I could be of more use here."

"I reckon I'm your man," said Len. "Max and Morris are both too heavy weights to be spared from the garrison, while I can do as well on this errand as any one else, I suppose."

"It's no fun for you to walk all the way down that mountain trail, with the weather so threatening, but undoubtedly you might gain a great deal for us," Max interposed.

"If he didn't get any more men to come up," Morris suggested, "he might be able to stop the other crowd's getting any recruits."

"Yes, that's so. When shall I start?"

"The sooner the better," said Max and Sandy in the same breath.

"Meaning after dark this evening," added Morris. "You go along down with me, and mebbe I'll show you a bit of fun to cheer you up. It'll be early moonlight; you wont have a bad tramp."

SOME
DANGEROUS TARGET PRACTICE.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME DANGEROUS TARGET PRACTICE.

This settled, Max and Sandy returned to their mining, while Len and Morris lay down behind the newly-strengthened breastwork. The elder man filled his pipe and stretched himself in the sunshine, while Len brought out one of the few books they had and read the stirring story of the robber Doones, and the giant farmer who got his sweetheart from among them by such a pleasant mixture of strategy and strength.

Morris was interested, but his position was easy, the pipe was soothing, the sun was warm, and Len's steady tones were slumberous in their influence. The reader, therefore, presently found his listener asleep, in spite of his interest and his resolution. Seeing this he shut the book, and fell into a

reverie over the strange series of circumstances that had brought him to this remote spot and outlandish surroundings, how—Crack—ping!

Morris was wide-awake. Len's dreams had vanished. Both men were on their knees behind the breastwork, guns in hand and every sense alert.

On the opposite dump they saw all three of the jumpers sitting with guns by their sides. They were gesticulating toward the smooth, whitish panel on the cliff walk which showed where the dyke had been cut through by the ice and floods that in ages past had carved this channel in the mountain side; they seemed to be paying no attention to the Last Chance people, but were pointing as though at a target, on the face of the cliff. After a short time Scotty raised his rifle and took steady aim, apparently at the target previously pointed out. The report of his gun was followed by the sharp click of the ball against the porphyry wall, and then by

its rattling among the rock on the slope of the dump in front of our sentinel friends.

"What do you suppose they're shooting at?" muttered Len, straining his eyes to find some mark.

Morris did not reply. He was watching the enemy going through another pantomime, which looked as though Bob was explaining something wrong in the shot. This was speedily concluded by Scotty's moving his position and aiming a third time at the face of the cliff, sighting at a little different angle than before.

Crack!—ping! went the report, and almost at the same instant a spruce log which lay just in front of Morris's face jarred under the blow of a half-ounce of lead, which sank deeply into its tough core.

"Great Harry!" shouted the incensed miner, "They're caroming on us!"

And before Len could interfere, Morris rose on one knee, brought his rifle to bear on the gambler, and pulled the trigger.

Scotty's hat flew off, and he tumbled over, while Bob and Stephens let loose a volley, which rattled harmlessly against the breastwork.

But Morris's snap shot had not gone quite true, for Scotty picked himself up almost instantly and scrambled out of range, followed by his two companions.

This firing had brought Sandy and Max to the door of the mine with anxious faces, and you may believe they were not only enraged, but made very solicitous by the incident.

"It's clear," remarked Max, "that they mean to kill us if they can do so without open-handed murder. Of course they intended those balls to glance and hurt somebody."

"I meant mine to, anyhow!" exclaimed Morris.

"I am glad you fired; it'll teach those scoundrels that we are wide-awake. But do you not think they knew you!"

"No, they couldn't see well enough. I was kneeling behind the wall."

"There is a' the mair necessity, Mr. Bushwick," remarked Sandy, "why you should go to town to-night."

"I feel it strongly, and Morris and I'll get away as soon as it is dark. You fellows have worked enough to-day, haven't you? Suppose you stay out now."

"All right; we will. We've got a fair sort of a hole in there, anyhow. It's pretty deep, and a man can walk upright all the way except in one or two places."

They saw no more of the enemy that day, however, and Sandy occupied himself by cooking an extra good supper.

By seven o'clock that evening a deep gloom filled the gulch, and was scarcely less heavy on the cliffs, for thick clouds stretched like a canopy from peak to peak.

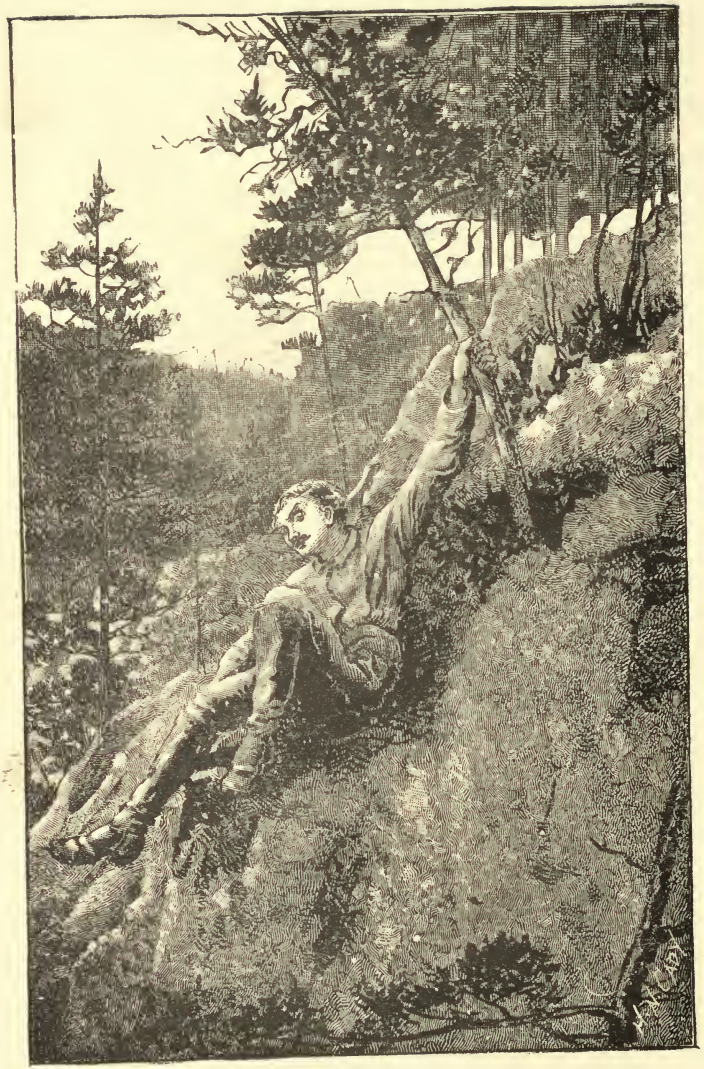
The only means by which the jumpers could get away from their camp was by the trail down the cañon, along which, during daylight, any one would be exposed for some distance to the fire of our friends in the garrison.

From the Last Chance, however, a man might easily ascend, as we know, and then, by care and trouble, he could pass along ledges above the Aurora, to where, some distance beyond, a crevice enabled him to clamber down to the bottom of the gulch, a few hundred yards below where the trail crossed the creek.

This is what Morris and Len did, as soon as the shadows of the range enveloped them in its curtaining gloom. When they had made their way far enough, they crept to the edge of the cliff, and could see the jumpers eating their supper around their fire on the safe side of the dump. A horse was hitched near by, and Old Bob was saddling him.

"You are right," Lennox whispered. "He's going to town to-night, and is most ready to start. We'd better hurry up, if you want to get into ambush ahead of him."

Moving as quietly as possible, they hastened to where the shelving of the cliff let them get down to the bed of the creek.



A SHORT CUT.

Silver Caves, Page 159.

Just as they reached this point, where they most needed the light to aid them, a fierce squall swept down upon the groaning and cracking branches of the spruce fringing the border of the crags, the air became suddenly colder, and whirling volleys of snowflakes were dashed in the faces of the wanderers.

"This is bad!" growled Morris. "'Taint none too easy a job to crawl down here in daylight, let alone trying to do it in this pitch; look out!"

Len had slipped on a wet stone and started to make the descent by an extremely short cut, but caught hold of a young tree stem just in time to stop himself. Warned by this, they felt their way with more caution, and finally succeeded in clambering down to the creek-bed without serious mishap. On reaching the trail the coating of snow was found undisturbed, showing that as yet no one had passed over it.

A few rods below, the path was crowded into a narrow passage between a steep bank

and the water. This place Morris thought would suit his purpose capitally, and here he proposed to meet the unsuspecting enemy and turn him back.

His first movement was to cut and carefully trim a stout cudgel.

"Quakin-asp is the kind of a stick to make his bones ache," said Morris, as he trimmed away the twigs.

"I've no doubt of it, and I'd like to stay and see the fun, but I reckon I'd better mosey if I'm to get to town before this snow buries me."

"You bet you had!" was the earnest advice of his roughly-speaking but good-hearted comrade. "Its no soft job you've got on hand, and you want to be mighty careful. Got a thick overcoat?"

"Yes."

"Any matches?"

"Yes, lots of 'em."

"Got your pistol?"

"Yes, borrowed Max's. Thought I might

meet wolves. I've heard 'em howl down here once or twice."

"They're 'round on snowy nights, but they're cowardly. Any whisky?"

"No; and I don't want any."

"Hm! I'm not so sure about it. Whisky's always good, I'm thinkin', especially on a cold night like this."

"You and Old Bob could agree on one point, at any rate."

"Me and Squint-eyes agree?—not much! Still,—whisky's good."

"Well, I'll wager you a jug o' molasses, or a new hat, that I can get to town better to-night without whisky than with it."

"Mebbe you're right. I know whisky's done me a heap more harm 'n it ever did me good, or any other fellow I ever heard of. Still, whisky's good!"

Len laughed at this defiance of rhyme and reason, and shaking hands, started away, Morris calling out as a last word that if he lost the trail in the snow, or got bewildered, the

only proper thing to do was to build a fire and camp "right there," instead of working into worse difficulties.

The brief gale with which the storm had leaped down from its headquarters in the heights of the Sierra had wholly subsided now, or only reappeared in occasional momentary squalls. The snow continued falling steadily, nevertheless, and already the ground, tops of the bushes, and all the protruding rocks were white. The stars of course were blotted out, but there was a pale, unearthly luminosity in the air which showed that somewhere the moon was shining.

"How splendid a sight it would be," thought the plucky young traveler as he pushed steadily on, "to be above this storm, and able to look down upon the wide sea of heaving, billowy snow-clouds, a sea of wan, soft vapor, gleaming in the moonlight here and there as rounded masses are rolled upward, and showing shadowy hollows or

curving wrinkles, coming and going, forming and changing before one's eyes."

Len had no great difficulty in keeping upon the trail, though he often felt himself in very delicate places where a wrong step might mean a bad fall, if not death.

In the wooded district lying between the Panther Creek gorge and the village side of the mountain, he got bewildered once or twice, but by keeping his wits about him passed safely beyond the forest, and felt thereafter in no great danger of going astray. Yet he was not prepared for the way the storm had quickly disguised all the landmarks, so that he found the trail unexpectedly hard to follow.

This latter half of the journey was the strangest part of all. Now that he had got out of the gorge and past the woods upon the ridge, he could see abroad for the most part; but the whole wide and beautiful landscape with which he had grown familiar was so lost and transformed that it was hard to

recognize its most familiar features. Where in the summer daylight, of that wonderfully crystal-clear daylight of the alpine air, he had been confronted by bold bluffs and clearly cut, prominent peaks, only the vaguest outlines of a few of the nearest headlands now appeared. Everything else was hidden under a veil of snowflakes. To his left, as he reached the opening, half-way down, which allowed the broadest view, a misty expanse took the place of a well-known rank of towering peaks; in front, an undefined, Titanic shadow against the sky showed dimly the wall of guardian cliffs enclosing the valley; while at the right, clusters of rugged and spruce-grown foot-hills were merged and invisible under the graceful arch of a mighty dome, faintly outlined in the tumult of the storm, which was wrapping its mantle so swiftly round every mountain.

In spite of his haste, and of the cold wind which hurled the powdered snow against his face and drove it into the crevices of his

clothing, Lennox stood still here to gaze upon this shadowy picture of a new world, this ghostly Walpurgis Night, which formed the most impressive scene he had ever beheld. And as he gazed, there came faintly to his ear, from far up the mountain behind him, a long, shrill scream as of some one in deadly distress.

Len knew it was the cry of the mountain lion, but in that palely-lighted dance of the snow-spirits among these awful rocks, it might well have been taken for the last cry of some forlorn and freezing witch.

Shaking off these fancies and the snow together, our hero turned his steps downward, and an hour later aroused the astonished landlord and went to bed at the hotel, thoroughly tired, but safe and far ahead of his adversaries.

OLD BOB TAKES A THRASHING.

CHAPTER XV.

OLD BOB TAKES A THRASHING.

Morris had not to wait more than fifteen minutes after Len's departure before he found his work at hand. The snow so softened the trail that the sound of the horse's hoofs were not heard until they had approached within a few feet of the ambush, and amid the blinding flakes, it was impossible to recognize the face of the well-muffled rider.

It was certainly Old Bob, however, who had been seen saddling the horse, and Morris concluded that the man before him was he. Had it been Scotty, he might have hardened his heart to almost any degree of severity, but heretofore he had had no quarrel with Bob, for whom he felt contempt chiefly, and he intended to let him off as easily as it would be safe to do.

Rousing himself at the sound of the stumbling nag, Morris had but half a minute to pause, before suddenly springing in front of the horse, with a blow at the animal's head and a yell like a wild Shoshone.

The startled and punished animal reared, spun round in the narrow trail as nimbly as a deer could have done, slipped on the wet stones, and fell headlong over the low bank at the edge of the trail, flinging his astounded rider over his head into the creek.

Morris, delighted at the effect of his first charge, followed it up with a second whoop, hearing which the horse picked himself up and rushed up the trial at break-neck speed, frightened out of its senses.

Old Bob, panic-stricken, dumb-founded, and shocked by his fall, was just rising from the shallow water, when Morris got down the bank. Leaping upon him, he seized the wretched victim by collar, and shook him by both hands as a terrier does a rat. Then snatching up his stick he began to lay it vigor-

ously over Bob's shoulders, keeping at it until the old fellow could find enough of his scattered wits and tangled legs to enable him to run away.

"Get back in your hole, you old sarpint!" Morris yelled, as he flung his cudgel after the retreating enemy. "Next time you thieves want to sneak off to town, mind you get permission of your betters!"

To this Bob replied, as was expected, by a couple of shots from his revolver, which, up to this time, he had fairly forgotten in the surprise of the unexpected attack, but Morris dodged behind a rock at the first flash, and no harm was done.

He did not return this random fire, but kept wide-awake for a few minutes, thinking Bob might come back with his companions. This, however, he did not do, and Morris lost no further time in starting home.

Bob admitted afterward, that he thought that at least two men had attacked him, which spoke well for Morris's activity, and that it

was Max who was giving him the shaking. Wet, sore, chilled and altogether dazed, he was in no condition to lead an attack against an ambushed enemy in the middle of a snowy night, nor were his accomplices eager to go and avenge his wrongs, preferring, so long as their own precious skins remained whole, to stay where they were and scold at him for his failure.

All this happened on Friday night, and to that fact the superstitious miner attributed his misfortunes.

The storm ceased before daybreak. Then what a strange, new, glorious landscape was that the sun rose upon! Its beams streamed athwart limitless spaces of snow. Overhead, the height Sandy had partly ascended rose in rounded outlines, a huge dome of unblemished white. Ahead, as if a mighty drift had been heaped across the gap between the mountains, lay the saddle over which the trail led through the woods; and inside the gorge all the roughnesses were smoothed, all the bowlders

and prostrate logs, the boughs of the spruces and cottonwoods, bushes, ferns, and weeds, were packed full and weighed down with the soft and flurry flakes.

Beyond calling for a little shoveling inside the fort, the snow was no hindrance, of course, to the underground work of the firm of B. B. & Co. They hammered away at improving their tunnel all day on Saturday and until late at night, and followed it by a pleasant Sunday's rest, in spite of their cramped quarters and tedious guard-duty.

The case was far different with the unfortunate jumpers, who, at the Aurora, had no shelter, and no way of getting free from the snow and the wet.

This misfortune was doubled by a thaw on Sunday afternoon, suddenly letting loose a great flood of melted snow, and turning the creek into a torrent, which, before Monday morning, had so swollen as to cover the trail and ford with a rushing flood six or eight feet deep, that it would have been madness to cross.

Old Bob and his companions, therefore, were not only very uncomfortable, but between the impassable creek and the unscalable wall on one side, and the rifles of our friends on the other, they were really prisoners.

"I reckon they're getting hungry over yonder, too," remarked Morris, when a heavy rain on Monday night had produced a second flood in the creek. "I don't believe they have grub enough to last much longer. They couldn't have brought a great deal with 'em, and it must be about used up."

That was the fact of the case. Rations were growing very short in the enemy's camp, and if the end had not come pretty soon they would have been obliged to surrender, since it was impossible to get to where their provisions had been cached with such great labor preparatory to this campaign.

Even to our friends, who had no such miseries to fret them, the situation was becoming extremely monotonous and annoying.

Max was glum and anxious. Sandy had lost his humor. Morris would growl softly at himself first for letting Old Bob get away with a single unbroken bone, and then for having allowed that kid, as he called Len, to go on alone to town in the storm. It was tedious enough to be shut up in this cabin, in the midst of such miserable weather, and in hourly danger of a bullet in one's brain, but when to that was added the worry over Len's safety, the suspense became nearly unendurable.

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD.

"I TELL you what it is!" exclaimed Morris, as Wednesday morning brought no tidings, and the clouds began to break away, "if that kid, or somebody else, don't show up to-day, I'm going to look him up. I oughtn't to 'a' been such a dod rotted fool as to let him go nohow."

No one opposed an objection; in fact it would have done no good if they had, since Morris was his own master, while at the same time, every one hoped he would be saved the journey.

The two went to work after breakfast, as usual, in the tunnel, and rejoined Sandy, who had combined sentinel with kitchen duty, to eat a famous dinner about one o'clock. The sun had been out an hour or two, and the

creek had fallen so rapidly, that Max thought it might now be crossed at a pinch.

"Heard anything from our neighbors this morning?" the guard was asked.

"Not a word. I was a leetle suspeecious in consequence, and kept my een peeled as ye say out here, but I kenned naething wrong."

"They're up to some trick or other, you can bet your boots," was the opinion of Morris, who followed his words by going out and peering through crevices in the barricade at the enemy's fortifications.

He had no more than got there, when they heard him yell out in angry astonishment, and when they hurried out of the cabin were amazed to see him standing on top of the wall, rifle in hand, like a picture of Sergeant Jasper at New Orleans.

"Look there, will you?" he shouted, pointing down the cañon.

The place where the trail was visible from the cabin was a stretch of about forty yards,

so situated between the cliff and the creek, that any one going up or down could not escape coming under rifle range from the fort. At its further end was the ford of the creek, which with the rise of the opposite bank could also be seen, a protruding bastion of rock cutting off all further view of the trail for a mile or more.

At the instant Morris had glanced through the crevice in the wall, he had seen his old enemy Scotty riding his horse at the top of its speed toward the creek, into which he was about to plunge, when he suddenly reined up, and seizing his rifle from the leathern sling, which held it balanced on the horn of his saddle, lifted it toward his shoulder. His horse, however, alarmed at the rapid motion, gave a shying jump, which nearly dislodged the man from the saddle, and the gun went off before any aim had been taken.

It was at this juncture that Morris had leaped upon the wall, and Sandy and Max had followed. Before they had time to speculate

upon the matter, there rushed into view down the opposite bank of the creek the stalwart, buckskin-clothed form of Buckeye Jim, leveling a revolver at the disconcerted horseman, who with quick presence of mind threw his hands above his head in sign of surrender and so saved his life,—"a great peety!" in Sandy's opinion.

Close behind Jim was to be seen Lennox with a stranger whom nobody at first reconized; and a moment later Mr. Anderson rode into view, driving slowly ahead of him the horses of the other three.

Jim still kept Scotty under his eye, while the others mounted and waded the stream, The stranger approached Scotty and took his rifle away from him, while Len seized the bridle of his horse. Then the hands came down and were placed behind his back, where they remained as though fastened, after which the cavalcade started up the trail toward the mines.

"Scotty's been handcuffed," Morris ex-

plained, when he saw these movements. "I can tell by the way he rides."

Suddenly Max exclaimed, "They're running right against the others' guns," and leaping over the wall he hurried, revolver in hand, straight toward the Aurora's dump.

Divining his intention, the others followed him, stumbling over the slushy and rolling stones in hot haste, and rushed up the face of the enemy's embankment like a storming party. They had almost as far to go as the others, and must make haste, breath or no breath. It was well they did so, for the first thing that met their eyes when they had reached the top of the dump, was Old Bob and Stevens lying behind two logs, guns in hand, ready to shoot the instant the approaching party should get clear of the last thicket.

Waiting for no orders or permission, Morris drew bead on the nearest man and fired, and with an awful cry Stevens sprang to his feet and fell back a senseless heap on the ground.

Bob, thunder-struck, whirled round to find the three men above him and all hope gone. Dropping on his knees in abject terror, and green with fright, the miserable poltroon shrieked for mercy, and he received the boon with the contempt of his foes not only, but of his friends, for the captured Scotty at once began pouring upon his head the most bitter revilings.

Except to take away his gun and give him a kick, nobody else paid any attention to him, for all were hurrying to congratulate Lennox upon his safe return, to welcome Mr. Anderson, to be introduced to Buckeye Jim and the stranger, who proved to be a Deputy Sheriff from Denver with a warrant for Scotty's arrest, and to clap each other on the back over the fortunate escapes and successes which had marked the last five minutes with so much excitement.

Until this hand-shaking had been gone through with, no one thought of the wounded man. The time had not been long, however,

and at first it was more needful to make sure of the living than to attend to the dead.

But was he dead?

"Na," replied Sandy, who was the first to kneel by his side and place a hand within his shirt-bosom to feel if any life remained. "His hairt beats."

"Glad to hear he's got one; where is he wounded?" asked Morris, also kneeling by his side. "Oh, here," pointing to where the blood was slowly dripping from the left arm of the prostrate and unconscious man.

"We maun cut away his sleeve," commanded Sandy, who seemed to know precisely what to do, "or he may bleed to death."

To slit up the sleeves of the coat and woolen shirt was the work of only half a moment, and the pain caused by the chill air striking the lacerated flesh, brought back consciousness in short order.

Glancing around the circle of strange faces, catching sight of the handcuffed Scotty

and mournful Bob, and feeling the numb pain in his naked arm, which Sandy was washing, the poor fellow turned aside his face, closed his eyes, and muttered in complete disgust :

"Why in thunder didn't ye let me die?"

"There's naething but mends for misdeeds," was Sandy's sententious rejoinder, as he cleansed the wound of blood, picked the shreds of cloth out of it, and lifted the arm to examine its extent.

"The ball ha' passed quite through the muscles," he announced, "and entered the man's side. I'm not so sure, my fair body, that it was worth while to bring you to."

"Eh! What's that? you don't mean to say—?"

"Keep cool!" commanded Sandy sternly "D'ye want to bleed to death, ye fool, before we can bind ye up? Keep quiet!"

Dipping a handkerchief in cold water he bound it tightly round the perforated arm, a proceeding which set Stevens groaning pitifully.

"Now let's see what else," he said; and began to search the chest of his patient for marks of harm.

The hole in the outside of the coat made by the bullet was plain enough, but no blood was visible on the vest or shirt. Opening his coat Sandy found the bullet-hole just over a pocket; and as he moved the garment farther, out tumbled a thick slab of tobacco holding a flattened bullet, which had not been able to force its way through. There was a black bruise on the skin, but to this ignoble agent the wicked man owed his life.

"Thank God!" he ejaculated, when it was shown him. No one echoed the words more fervently then Morris, for though he could have acquitted his conscience, had his bullet, in defence of his friends against reckless ruffians, proved the death of one of them, yet he was heartily relieved to know that his hand had sent no human soul to judgment.

"Aye, thank God!" retorted Sandy with deep sarcasm, "who, in His inscrutable

wisdom, sends the greatest fuils the greatest fortunes."

Having had his arm bandaged, Stevens was able to get upon his feet and walk, supported by Old Bob. The whole party then slowly made their way to the cabin, Sandy running in advance to get the cooking started again.

The wounded Stevens is given a bunk to lie in, and Scotty a box to sit on, but the Sheriff declines to take off the handcuffs.

"What is the charge against him?" the Sheriff is asked.

"Horse-stealing and various other things," replied the deputy. "Mr. Anderson can tell you more about it than I, who am acting on a requisition from the Governor of Illinois."

"He stole some valuable horses from my farm near Aurora, Illinois, several months ago," said that gentleman, "and we only lately heard that he was in this region. It's a sore subject with Buckeye Jim here," continued Mr. Anderson, smiling on that big man, "for we suspected him for a while."

"That's all right now," Jim responded heartily. "A man who is fool enough to keep the bad company I've been in sometimes, must share their color, I suppose, whether he deserves it or not. We'll say no more about it."

While this conversation is going on, and dinner is preparing, Max and Old Bob are talking outside the door.

"Why do you make all this trouble, Bob?" Max asked—"What did you expect you'd get out of it?"

"Reckoned I'd get a good mine. I lowed you wasn't staying up here for nothin'."

"And you thought it was the Aurora I was at work in?"

"To be sure; where else? this is no good!"

"Isn't it? Well, we'll see about that. At any rate the Aurora is worthless, and I have merely been using that as a runway to get to the back end of this mine easily, through a cross-cut. We're not working the Aurora, we're working the Last Chance. You could

a' jumped that all day and we wouldn't have objected enough to fight, but when you came over here we had to."

"And you've won the turn," said Bob dejectedly.

"Yes I've won, just as I did once before, Bob, — maybe you remember — when a couple of burglars tired to crawl into my window."

"I don't know nothin' about that," Bob replied, in a dogged tone.

"Don't you? Well now, Bob, this makes twice you escaped being shot in your rascalities with me, and if you ever see your way out of this present scrape, I'm thinking you'd better leave the gulch."

"Leave; you bet I'll leave. I 'low you wouldn't be none too friendly, but that there Scotty would murder me the first day he got loose, though this bust-up aint no more my fault 'n' 'tis his'n."

"Do you think so?"

"Think so; I know it! And I've got to

get clear away from this country, or I'm a dead man!"

"Maybe I can be of some use to you—I mean in saving you from Scotty; but you must tell me who was with you that night you came to our cabin."

"It was Stevens," said Bob quietly.

"Could you prove it, if you were wanted to?"

"Yes, I could."

"Well, Bob, there's your horse, and a trail clear to Denver. Good-by. I hope you'll do better hereafter than I've known you to yet"

Max turned his back and went into the cabin, where all the rest were gathering around the table. By the time he had filled his plate and had found a seat on an inverted powder-can, Squint-eyed Old Bob was taking his unworthy self out of the cañon, and out of my story, at the best pace he knew how.

He got safely away and never came back; but I am sorry to say he behaved no better,

and probably only escaped hanging at last by getting crushed in a snowslide.

Before dinner was ended, a new arrival, and a hungry one, appeared in the person of the Superintendent of Mr. Anderson's mine near the village, a gentleman whom our firm knew well, and had a high respect for, both as an expert in mining and as an honest man.

THE CAPITALIST EXAMINES THE MINE.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CAPITALIST EXAMINES THE MINE.

THE capitalist frankly told Max and Len, as the three sat a little apart from the others, that he had great faith in that region, and was willing to invest a reasonable amount of money in any prospect that gave him sufficient encouragement.

He recalled how the attempt had been made to dupe him at Old Bob's diggings a short distance below, and said that he had felt so well satisfied that nothing this creek could show was good, that he had resolved never to look at any property on its banks again.

At the same time, the behavior of Mr. Brehm, during the examination of Bob's prospect-hole to which he had just alluded, was so upright and intelligent, that when he heard

that something different had been discovered on Panther Creek, and by whom, he had readily consented to come and see it. "Now I want to see all you have to show me; and if you have anything good, I've no doubt we can make some sort of a bargain. But I don't profess to understand these things as well as some, and at any rate two heads are better than one. 'In a multitude of counsellors there is wisdom,' the Wise Man says. Therefore I shall ask you to let my superintendent go in with us."

This long speech was not in the least tiresome to its hearers, as you may well believe; indeed they took a great liking to Mr. Anderson's frank, bluff, and business-like manner, which inspired both respect and confidence.

At once, therefore, the little lamps were lighted, old canvas coats were lent to the visitors, and the four started into the Last Chance tunnel, Max leading the way, and Len bringing up the rear.

Sandy remained at the cabin, partly because

he felt himself an outside factor, and partly to bear company with Buckeye Jim, Morris, and the Deputy Sheriff, who were guarding the prisoner, and chatting over Rocky Mountain adventures in a way very entertaining to the Scotchman.

Apologies for the unworkman-like condition of the mine were unnecessary, since everybody knew the history of the undertaking, so that nothing was said until the inner chamber had been reached, at the crosscut, the shape and situation of which was first explained to the visitors.

"Is your title unquestionable?" asked Mr. Anderson.

"Yes; we had the papers examined by a lawyer, and the transfer properly recorded. There is no flaw, that we can discover."

"Where does this water come from?"

"Mainly from a surface seam. I think it could be drained off above ground by a little engineering, and thus stopped entirely without much expense."

While this colloquy was in progress, the superintendent had taken up a pick and chipped off same pieces of rock from the roof and sides of the vein, at which he was looking very sharply under the flame of his smoky lamp. Lennox noticed with a thrill of gratification how his expert eye, with the instinctive perception acquired by a long training, threw away what they had learned was worthless rock, while the brown stuff, which they had proved to be valuable, was selected for closer examination.

"This is queer-looking stuff," he remarked, "I never came across anything just like it. What do you take it to be, Mr. Brehm?

"That, sir," Max replied, with a bit of tremor in his voice, for this was the first announcement, "that, sir, I suppose to be a telluride of gold, carrying about twenty-eight ounces to the ton."

"Great Scott! That's the best show of gold in these parts! And this black grit must be a lead-carbonate!"

"So we are told by Denver assayers. They pronounce it a soft carbonate, rich in lead and iron, and worth—here's the letter—about one hundred and twenty dollars to the ton."

Both Mr. Anderson and the superintendent were vastly interested by this information, which evidently they accepted as true. The latter gentleman read aloud the assayer's statement of his analysis of the ore, and pointed out that it gave very little black-jack, antimony, etc., which indicated that the ore would be easy to smelt, a most important consideration in estimating its value.

"Is the whole vein, so far as you have gone, like this?" Mr. Anderson asked, as he held up his light, and scrutinized the walls and roof of the small chamber.

"No; there is not much at the very entrance, though, after we learned to recognize them, we could find traces of both the carbonate and telluride clear to the door-way, but we saw much more in the interior, and argued that the deeper we went the richer the mine

would grow, which has proved true up to the present time. If it hadn't been for those pesky jumpers, we should have gone several yards deeper."

"The vein doesn't seem to be uniformly composed of the ore minerals."

"No, it has been growing very strange in its distribution of late, a fact we began to notice when we were about two-thirds of the way to this point. The lode gradually became filled with more or less globular cavities, which steadily increased in size. The wall of each of these cavities is formed almost wholly of the telluride, and the spaces between are pretty nearly dead rock. Inside, whenever they are small,—there are some little ones in the roof, just over your head, which show it well,—they are quite filled with nearly solid carbonate; but when they are larger—the last one we struck, you can see a remnant of it in the breast, was as big as a barrel—they are only partly full, and the ore of the interior soft and crumbling."

"They are like miniature caves or monstrous geodes," said Mr. Anderson.

"Yes," Len put in—he had been quiet as long as he could stand it, "and sometimes we are warned of what is ahead by the hollow sound."

"Maybe we can find one now, to show you," Max suggested; and, taking a pick, he moved toward the extremity of the tunnel, whither the rest followed him.

Tapping here and there the breast of rock forming the head of the tunnel, Max presently detected near the floor a peculiar echo; all listened, and agreed that this sound denoted a hollow.

"I'm not very sure, but I'll try it," he said, and slipping aside swung back his sturdy arms preparatory to delivering a tremendous stroke.

Down came the pick, crashed through a shell of rock, and sank out of sight, except a few inches of handle.

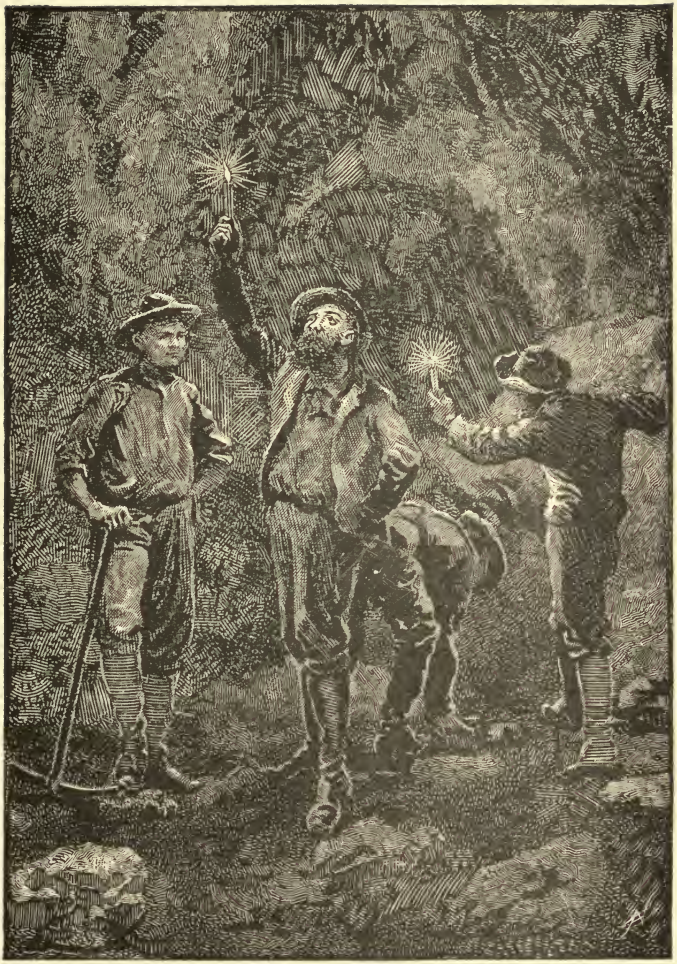
"You've hit it, sure!" exclaimed Mr.

Anderson. "Make the hole a little bigger, so that we can see in."

Max did so, knocking off the edges until Len could put head and arms in, whereupon he reported that he could neither touch nor see the further side.

Drawing back, the hole was again enlarged, and Max tossed in a stone, which was heard to roll downward a long distance.

The whole party was now excited in no small degree. Taking the superintendent's candle in addition to his own, Mr. Anderson crept inside the aperture, cautiously descended a short incline, closely followed by the others, and soon reached a level bottom. The adventurers now found themselves in a large natural chamber—the interior, in fact, of an extensive cavity like those of a lesser size which have been described. The flickering rays of their lamps and candles let them see that overhead was a dome-like ceiling, seamed with bright streaks of galena, and interspersed, in a sort of rude frecso, with



THE FAIRY CAVE.

Silver Caves, Page 202.

brown carbonates of lead, greenish chlorides of silver and pure white talc. At several points in this remarkable chamber small openings appeared, apparently leading to similar chambers beyond and above.

Choosing one of these apertures opposite the breach by which they had entered, they enlarged it somewhat, until one by one they could squeeze through into a natural tunnel which ran for a hundred feet or more on an upward slant. Following it slowly, they clambered over boulders of galena, cubic crystals of lead, almost always accompanied by silver, and left the first of human footprints upon mounds of soft gray carbonates. Here, as before, the walls and roof showed themselves to be solid masses of chloride and carbonate ores of silver, through which small deposits of the telluride of gold were lying like plums in a pudding.

Returning to the starting-point the explorers broke down another doorway, and passing through a second natural tunnel a

distance of about forty feet, found indications of other chambers and passages beyond.

"It would seem," cried Mr. Anderson, who was now more astonished than were our young friends, the fortunate owners;—"it would seem as though nature had selected choice treasures from her great storehouses, and had placed them in these chambers and made them beautiful with glittering crystals, wrought in the heart of these remote mountains, on purpose to lure men to still greater exertions and richer rewards of labor and perseverance."

"She's had to wait a good while for visitors to her show," Len remarked.

"Yes," Mr. Anderson replied, "but that is no matter. Nature is never in a hurry. She can afford to be patient and wait, and let things move slowly. With her 'a thousand years is but a day.' She has had, and will have, all the time there is."

"For that matter," Max remarked, catching up the strain, "what is this little bit of beauty

and interest, curious as it is, beside the splendid shows nature arranges for us, with never wearying change, from morning till night."

"And from night till morning," added the superintendent, remembering the brilliant heavens spread over the clean-aired mountains.

"Nevertheless, for our purposes," said Mr. Anderson, heartily, "this does very well indeed, and I compliment you most sincerely on your success."

Then they made their way out and told their wonderful tale. The storm had wholly cleared from the mountains, and the sun was shining brilliantly, robing the magnificent landscape, softened by autumn haze, in its most glorious garb.

Buckeye Jim and Morris were hearty in their congratulations, and began to build enthusiastic hopes that their own worthless Aurora might be pushed into a similar group of silver-caves. But that lode lay on the

wrong side of the porphyry partition, and I regret to say that the money they afterwards spent in trying the experiment was wholly wasted.

The deputy sheriff from Denver was not greatly moved; said he had heard tall stories before; knew how to boom a prospect-hole as well as the next man, and altogether made himself disagreeable by his air of unbelief and his sneering tone. It is wise, no doubt, to be cautious, but it is very unfortunate for a man, and especially for a young man, to get into such a state of mind that no statement is to be credited, nothing considered genuine, and no man accepted as honest and well-meaning.

As for the prisoners, they were sullen, irritated by the good fortune of those whom they had intended to ruin, and spent their time in planning vengeance upon Old Bob for misleading them and getting them into a scrape from which they could see no escape,—since, in fact, there was none.

"Fools aye see ither folk's faults, and forget their ain," Sandy informed them when he had become disgusted with their profane growling and threats.

Of all the company in the cabin, indeed, Sandy McKinnon, naturally, was the one most deeply interested in this marvelous find, which, for him, meant a sudden and unhoped-for good fortune out of his brief essay in America.

"Hech, man," he cried out, "it's jest the old days of Alladdin an' his lamp—the open-sesame business, ye mind. Why, the riches o' it must be untold!"

SUCCESS ACHIEVED.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SUCCESS ACHIEVED.

THE next morning, after all the rest had started for town (for Stevens was quite able to travel, despite his wound), Mr. Anderson and his adviser sat down to a business talk with our heroes.

"As I understand it," the capitalist began, "you were anxious to sell an interest in this mine, and hoped to persuade me to buy such an interest. Is that so?"

"It is," came in double response from Max and Lennox.

"Do you still wish to sell, in view of the remarkable disclosures yesterday?"

"I do not see how otherwise we are to get money to carry on the work," said Max, "and therefore, though we should be glad to retain

the whole, I fear we shall be obliged to dispose of a part."

"How great a part?"

"Last week," replied Max smiling, "I should have said half, but now I think a quarter would be enough to take off, at any rate, as the first slice."

"What is your idea of price?"

"Well, yesterday my partners and I had agreed upon a price, but I fear that wont do for to-day, since Len and Sandy here seem to think the mine looks a little more promising than heretofore."

You should have seen the grins that passed around that circle and answered one another.

"We would like to hear what you have to offer," Len suggested, addressing Mr. Anderson.

"Well," the capitalist answered, "I've been thinking about it, and am free to say, that I feel disposed to join with you,—buy a share of your mine, organize a new firm, and go in for its thorough development; but before I

can say what I am willing to give, I must know more than I do as to the probable cost of certain preparations, such as the drainage of the mine, the availability of timber for inside bracing, etc., the cost of making a wagon road up here, the kind of winter houses which will be needful, and various other things. How would ten thousand dollars strike you as payment for half the mine?"

Sandy's eyes opened wide. That is a great deal of money to a Scotchman. Lennox looked as though he was just ready to jump at it, but Max calmly raised one foot over his knee and said quietly:

"It doesn't come within sight of the proper figure."

Mr. Anderson laughed, and put on his hat for a tramp up the cliff, where, Max had said, it might be possible to head off the water.

A week later all assembled in Mr. Anderson's office in the Camp to hear his proposition.

"I will give you," he said, "fifty thousand dollars in cash for one half of the mine, for if I cannot have more than a quarter, it will not pay me to touch it; a new partnership to be made between us four for continuing the work, and the profits to be divided according to the amount which each one contributes under the new arrangement toward putting the mine in a shape to produce and sell ore."

This proposition was accepted. And while the proper papers were being made out, the three members of the old firm of Brehm, Bushwick & Co. went aside to settle their own affairs preparatory to dissolving the partnership.

"McKinnon," said Len, as spokesman, "Max and I have been studying what ought to be your share of this money. We think that the circumstances have been so peculiar, that it would not be doing as well by you as we want to, if we stick by the old agreement, and at the same time we felt that you were not quite even with us in the affair. We

thought we would split the difference by offering you ten thousand dollars and a chance to come into the new firm for so much as you choose to re-invest. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Parfectly—parfectly, and I thank ye for your leeberality, since I wadna hae blamed ye had ye stuck to the original terms, though, to be sure, they would 'a' fallen far short o' what ye are proposin'. But, I ha' had eno' o' the mining business. It's no what I was cut out for, I'm thinkin', and wi' all respect to you, and carryin' away a life-long gladness, that I ever met ye, I will take my belongings back to auld Scotland and aye stay there."

And so he did.

The new firm, Mr. Anderson, Max and Lennox, put the Silver Caves, as they called the new mine, into fine shape; constructed wagon-roads, built good houses in place of the old cabin, and in a few years were carrying on one of the most extensive mines in that part of the mountains. It came to be only one in a

group of good mines which were discovered on both sides of the creek, when men learned what kind of ore to look for in that district. But none of them have ever excelled this in value, nor is any company more likely to reach a higher and higher prosperity, than this first mine and its managers, in which we have been interested; a success due not to luck, but to keen eyes, willing hands, and stout hearts.

THE END.